







S. GILBERT 

LIVES
OF
THE ENGLISH SAINTS.

St. Gilbert,
PRIOR OF SEMPRINGHAM.

MANSUETI HÆREDITABUNT TERRAM, ET DELECTABUNTUR IN
MULTITUDINE PACIS.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE substance of the following pages is taken from the life of St. Gilbert, published in the recent Edition of Dugdale's Monasticon, from a manuscript in the British Museum. The name of the author is unknown ; it appears however incidentally that he was of the order of Sempringham, and knew St. Gilbert personally in his last days. Portions of the life have been put together from contemporary sources, as, for instance, the well known story of the nuns of Watton, taken from St. Aelred's narrative published in Twysden's Collection. On that story itself it may be well to say a few words. The time is now past when it was necessary to prove that monasteries were not nests of wickedness. Indeed it is high time that it should be so, for to any one who looks into the evidence for such an assertion, it is wonderful that it should ever have been made. The case is made out simply by raking together all the isolated facts related by

historians from the fourth century to the Reformation, and bringing them to bear against monastic institutions without distinction of order, age or country. In one popular book, for instance, the customs of Catholic monks and Manichæan heretics, of monks in their first fervour, and of Orders in a relaxed state, are put side by side. There we may learn that monks were in the habit of fasting on Sundays, of neglecting the fasts of the church, and of abstaining from meat, because the Creation was evil ;¹ and all this because the council of Gangra condemned certain heretics for such malpractices. What would be said if the same sort of evidence was applied to any other history ? No one denies that at some periods monasteries required reform, that is, that in the intervals of their long services, monks conversed together instead of keeping silence and employing themselves in manual labour ; nay, that in process of time, and in some monasteries, instances of flagrant wickedness might be found. But the unfairness of heaping all instances together, without attempting to classify or arrange them historically, will be evident to any one who thinks at all seriously on the subject. And indeed so materially have old prejudices been weakened within the last few years, that few persons will be found who consider such stories, as the

¹ Fosbroke, *British Monachism*, c. 2. p. 11.

one above mentioned, to be really specimens of the age in which they occurred. Still, however, as they ever leave vague and indefinite suspicions upon the mind, it may be well to quote the opinion of the very work to which we have alluded as especially unfair to the monastic orders. In Fosbroke's *British Monachism*, the following passage occurs: "It is singular that notwithstanding the story of the poor nun in Alfred of Revesby and Bale, Nigel Wireker says nothing of this order but what observation of the rule implies; but it was yet young when he wrote."¹ This Nigel was a satirist, who details in verse the faults of the monastic orders of his day. Cave makes him to have flourished about the year 1200, full eighty years after the first institution of the Nuns of Sempringham.

It only remains to add that in writing the following pages, use has been made of a manuscript life of St. Gilbert, kindly lent by its author, William Lockhart, Esq., now a brother of the Institute of Charity established at Loughborough.

¹ Fosbroke, *British Monachism*, c. 6. p. 78.

LIFE OF

St. Gilbert,

PRIOR OF SEMPRINGHAM, CIRC. A. D. 1085-1189.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

IT was a sad and dreary time for England when first Norman William mounted the throne which he inherited from the blameless Edward. The nobles were wandering about among the woods and forests of the land, and living like robbers among the impassable marshes of the country ; while Edgar, England's darling, was an exile in Scotland.¹ Her pleasant homes were turned into military fastnesses, for each man fortified his dwelling ; and as he closed door and window at night, the head of the family said Benedicite, and the household responded Dominus, not knowing whether their homestead might not be burned over their heads at night.² Who can tell the horrors inflicted on those of English blood by Odo, the bishop of Bayeux, and William Fitz-Osborne ?³ Noble English virgins and matrons were the victims of the brutal Norman sol-

¹ Matt. Paris, 1001.

² Matt. Paris, p. 999.

³ Orderic 507-523.

diers ; monasteries were stripped of their lands, and many a Saxon expelled from his possessions to make room for a foreigner.¹ Geoffrey, the mail-clad bishop of Coutances, alone had 280 manors for his share of the spoil.² A love of hunting seems to be the darling sin of our Norman monarchs, and to this William sacrificed whole villages, with their churches and inhabitants. He had a summary way of increasing his forest-lands ; no need of planting trees, or waiting for the slow growth of oaks and beeches. There were then many woods in merry England, and he simply swept away the homes of the villagers who dwelt amongst and near them, so that the lands returned to their natural state of wilderness, and the stag couched undisturbed on the hearth of the peasants or in the long fern where once was the altar of the village church. But the greatest blot on William's fair fame is the terrible depopulation of the north of England. In the depth of winter the Conqueror went forth to his fearful revenge ; he stalked on boldly over mountains covered with snow and frozen rivers ; the horses dropped down dead with fatigue under his knights, but still he pressed on. The aged archbishop of York died of grief at the approach of these miseries, and the bishop of Durham with the relics of St. Cuthbert fled before him. Behind him was famine and pestilence, and a hundred thousand men are said to have perished. He left not a village standing between York and Durham.³

And yet, relentless and ambitious as he was, Norman William was one of the best monarchs of his age

¹ Orderic, 523.

² Orderic, 523.

³ Simeon. Dunelm. in ann. 1069.

and race. If he was stern, it was with a calm and majestic sternness, very different from the bestial fury of his son the Red King. On his death-bed he declared that it was on principle that he had put in prison innocent men, because they were dangerous.¹ In the beginning of his reign England had a prospect of peace, when he went back to Normandy and displayed to his noble visitors the beauty of the long-haired sons of England and its gold-tipped drinking horns, and congratulated himself on his easy conquest. His policy in the first years of his reign tended to effect a quiet and gradual amalgamation of the Norman and Saxon races. He married Saxon maidens to his nobles, and though he gave the lands of Englishmen to his followers, yet on the other hand he transplanted Englishmen to the continent and endowed them with Norman fiefs. His administration of the law, though stern, was rigidly just, and it was said that a girl laden with gold might pass through England unharmed. He did not oppress the poor ; it was rather the noble who felt his iron yoke, and probably the Saxon serf was not worse off under his Norman lord than under the Saxon Thane. The Englishmen had already begun to clip their long hair and to adopt Norman fashions, when the rising under earl Morcar took place, and the beautiful and generous Edwin treacherously perished, to the universal grief of England. The Conqueror shed some tears over him, but from that moment he seems to have been convinced that a gentle hand could not rule England, and his inexorable policy began. Again, it should not be forgotten that in his exercise of Church patronage, he was free from simony, the besetting sin of

¹ Orderic, 660. William of Poitiers, 211.

his successors. He seems to have had a quick perception of character ; and, with the same acuteness by which on his death he foretold that his wily Henry would outstrip his brethren, he fixed upon great churchmen to rule the English sees. It was perhaps fortunate for the Conqueror that his interest coincided with his duty, but it is true that the English church was very much improved by the conquest. It may be that he was desirous of weakening the native courts, and breaking up the old organization which kept up an English feeling ;¹ but however this be, he certainly gave a great boon to the church when he restored her internal jurisdiction instead of subjecting her to the civil tribunal of the Hundred courts. Whatever motives influenced him to remove the Saxon Abbots from Saxon monasteries, it is certain that generally religious houses flourished under the Norman successors whom he appointed. The Saxon clergy were too often in a state of rude ignorance and jovial indulgence. The great Abbey of Abingdon was well rid of its abbot, Sparhafoc, the cunning craftsman, who absconded with the gold with which he had been intrusted to make a new crown for the Confessor.² A general reform took place throughout England on the model of St. Alban's, which became a school of holy discipline under Paul its first Norman abbot. The poor monks may have grumbled at his uncouth Norman fish-pie,³ which he introduced into the infirmary instead of the savoury meat, which was too apt to invite the brethren to put themselves on the sick list ; but they could not help acknowledging the vast advancement of religion under

¹ Wilkins' Concilia, i. 368.

² Palgrave's Anglo-Saxon Constitution, p. 175.

³ Matt. Paris, vit. Abb. St. Alb.

his rule. The fine old Saxon character was every where greatly impaired, and no where more so than in the church ; a set of hunting and hawking abbots, men who loved hippocras and mead sat in the seat of the ancient saints of the land. On the whole, Abbot Paul may not have been far wrong when he looked down on his predecessors, though of the noblest blood in England, as somewhat thick-witted and ignorant. An intellectual and active element was introduced into the English church which it had not before ; and though the Saxon historian declares that England took no part in the dispute between Pope and Antipope, yet William, by his appointment of Lanfranc, prepared the way for breaking down the mischievous nationality which, even more than our tossing sea, was beginning to cut us off from the rest of Christendom.¹

All these however are but the bright parts in a dark picture ; the sins of Saxon England were to be punished, and tremendous was the amount of physical suffering which the poor country had to endure. The fusion between the rival races could only be effected by a red hot furnace of suffering. Such was the hatred which existed between them, that even the ties of religion failed at first to bind them together. When for instance a Norman abbot came with his Norman chants to Glastonbury, the monks rebelled, and declared that they would not change their beloved Gregorian tones ; then abbot Turstin introduced an armed band into the church, and two monks were slain, one at the very altar, the other at its foot. The monks defended themselves as they best could with the forms, and candlesticks of the choir, at last the monk's frock got the better of the coat of mail, and the soldiers were driven

¹ Matt. Paris, ubi sup.

out, but not till the church had been stained with blood, and the crucifixes and images of the Saints transfixed with arrows.¹ In St. Alban's too, Abbot Fred-eric was the head of the Saxon interest in the south of England, and the two hostile parties lasted in the abbey, through the time of the next abbot up to the election of his successor. If these quarrels raged in the sanctuary itself, it is easy to imagine that the world without was not in a state of peace.² There was again another cause which increased the sufferings of poor England, as well under the reign of the Conqueror as of his successors ; and this was the quarrel of the Norman barons with their kings. In France feudalism was much more systematized than in England. William, when in Normandy, was but the head of a feudal state, the first among his peers.³ He asked leave of his barons before he invaded England, and when the field of Hastings had been won, and William fairly seated on his throne, the Norman nobles began to think that their work was done, and returned home to their manors in Normandy. William saw that he could not count on a feudal army, and henceforth employed mercenaries.⁴ When his authority was strengthened in England he was much more absolute across the channel than on the continent. He held his English crown by a very different tenure from that by which he wore his ducal coronet in Normandy. There he was a feudal baron of the king of France, but England he held by right of conquest ; and this told even more on his own followers than on the English. To the Sax-

¹ Simeon Dunelm, in ann. 1082.

² Matt. Paris, vitæ, abb. St. Alb. 1005. ³ Orderic, 493.

⁴ Orderic, 512.

ons he was the representative of Edward the Confessor, whose laws he had sworn to observe, but the Normans who followed him to England, when once on English soil, lost their Norman, without distinctly acquiring Saxon rights. Hence the feudal system was at first much less defined in England than in France ; and hence the bloody wars which the English kings had to wage against their nobles. Bitterly do the barons complain of the Red King at Henry's accession, and fairly does the monarch promise improvement ; but the wily Beauclerc only waits his time till he feels his throne firm beneath him. It is true that these quarrels made the English necessary to their Norman monarchs ; loyally did they serve the Conqueror on the continent, and Normandy saw her fair fields ravaged by her own Duke, leading a Saxon army. Again his son William owed his throne to his Saxon subjects, who, by the persuasion of their archbishop Lanfranc, assisted him against his disaffected barons. Ultimately the English gained by it, but during this period of transition they were miserably ground down between the opposing parties. Neither king nor baron cared much for the poor Saxon, and Magna Charta has much more about baronial than about popular rights.

Alas ! for England in this dreadful time. All countries have had their day of probation, but few have passed through such a fiery trial as our own. Scarcely had England recovered from the Dane, when the Norman came, and Dane-land, March-land, and Saxon-land, with the remnants of the old Cymri, in Cumbria, all alike felt his yoke ; and if it was an iron yoke under the Conqueror, what was it under his successors ? The Conqueror had a rough justice of his own,

his long arm reached from one end of England to the other, and he knew every hide of land within it ; he even several times endeavoured to learn the language of his new subjects, that he might judge their complaints himself, and would have done so, if he had not been too old to begin grammar anew.¹ But under the reign of his foul successor, "riot was the rule" of England. He was a man almost ludicrous in his knavish wickedness, who blasphemed and robbed with a jest, and grinned over his captive when he had him in his power.² He introduced into England a class of men even worse than the robber-soldier ; his companions were effeminate youths, stained with terrible crimes ; and far worse were they in their silken robes and long hair, parted in the middle, like that of women, and their feet clad in peaked shoes of fantastic shape, than the lawless soldier, with his conical cap of iron, and his corslet of steel rings, albeit he ruthlessly wasted the stock of the husbandman. The foul lust of this man cried aloud to heaven for vengeance, and before he fell like a beast of the field, in the New Forest, men felt a strange presentiment that the wrath of God was coming upon him, and holy monks, even in their dreams, prayed to our Lord ; O Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of mankind, for whom Thou hast shed Thy precious blood on the cross, look in mercy upon Thy people, groaning in misery, under the yoke of William.

Our blessed Lord, however, did not leave his people without consolation in this dreadful time ; the Church was still up in arms against the world ; though a contest was going on in her own bosom, and such a man as Ralph Flambard sat on the throne of Durham, yet

¹ Orderic, 520.

² Will. Malms. Gesta Reg. lib. 4.

she had inexhaustible resources in the Saints whom the Lord raised up within her. St. Anselm was a match for the Red King, with all his satellites, whether soldiers or prelates. Even his father, inflexible as he was, was foiled by the crosier of St. Wulstan ; and the simple monk, Guitmund, refused to hold either bishopric or abbacy in England, bidding the king beware lest the fate of unjust conquerors should await him ; and so he left him, and went back across the sea to his quiet monastery of St. Leuffroy of the Cross, in Normandy, a monk as poor as he came. So also, at the time when foul and lawless wickedness was raging in England, under William Rufus, the Lord was nurturing in secret in His church, a man to whose angelic purity it was afterwards given to create the only wholly English order, one destined to provide a refuge for holy virgins from the snares of the world ; and it is the life of this man that, by God's blessing, we hope now to show truthfully to the reader.

Gilbert in the Schools.

It was about the close of the reign of our first William, that Gilbert was born, though the exact year is not known.¹ His father, Sir Joceline, was a Norman knight, and a good soldier, whose services had been rewarded by many gifts of land in Lincolnshire, and especially with the lordship of Sempringham in that county. He was probably one of the vavassors, or inferior nobility

¹ He was above a hundred years old when he died, in 1189.

of the realm.¹ His mother was a Saxon lady, the daughter of a Thane, and of the same rank as her husband. He is thus an early instance of the blending of Norman and Saxon blood, and though, as will be seen by and bye, his character partook more of the homeliness of his mother's race, yet certain adventurous journeyings on the Continent, showed that he had also some of the spirit of his kinsmen, who went forth from home to gain England, the south of Italy and Sicily. But little is known of his parents, and they soon disappear from the history, so that they most probably died before he had attained the age of manhood. All that appears from his chronicler is, that they lived on their estate, "in the midst of their people." A little before his birth, it is said that his mother dreamt that the moon had come down from the sky, to rest upon her bosom ; and his fanciful disciple sees in it a pre-sage that his childhood, pale, wan, and sickly as the crescent of the new moon, was destined by the grace

¹ The Bollandists have conjectured that Gilbert was connected with Gilbert de Gant, a great baron who came over with William the Conqueror, whose wife's cousin he was. They, however, have no reason to give for their opinion, except that he was called Gilbert, and that the family of Ghent, or Gant, held the barony of Folkingham, near Sempringham. It will afterwards appear, that Joceline was not a tenant *in capite*, and therefore not one of the great nobility of the realm, and that he held the lands of Sempringham of this very Gilbert. He is here called *miles*, and not *comes*, and it is observable that in one place, the Latin life of Gilbert in Dugdale, says, that Gilbert was "*de plebe electus*."—Vit. S. Gil. ap. Mon. Angl. vol. 6, p. 2, p. 14. The Conqueror was not by any means particular as to the nobility of the men whom he employed, nor, indeed, were his successors, as his son Henry, who is said to have been fond of low company.

of the Sun of righteousness, to expand into a full orb of brightness. At all events, it is certain that, as a child, he was no favourite with those about him. His recollections of childhood, as he used afterwards, in extreme old age, to tell his canons, were very painful. He was puny, plain, and shy ; his father saw in him no qualities, either of mind or body, to make a soldier. He was therefore, "by divine providence, in his tender age," destined to be a clerk ; had it not been for his childish ailments, he might have been all his days a thick-witted baron, spending all his time in the saddle, with harness on his back. Even here, however, he did not seem at first to have found his element ; like most children, he disliked his book, and for a long time he seems to have been allowed to run wild as he would. His features were plain, and nothing is said in his history about his mother's love. He was looked upon as half an idiot, and he used to tell of himself that the very servants would hardly sit at table with him, so much was he neglected and despised. Thus did God shield him from the deceitfulness of riches, for it is expressly said that his father was a rich man. He was nursed up in the school of poverty and humiliation, and the shadow cast from his sickly and unamiable childhood rested upon him throughout his life, tempering the burning heat of prosperity.

As is often the case with dull children, the reproaches of his friends, or the natural expansion of his mind, produced a sudden re-action, and he began to apply himself to study. His parents seeing him take this turn, determined to send him to Paris :¹

¹ He is said to have gone in Gallias, which probably implies Paris. It could not be Normandy, for which the author of

thither then in early youth he went, as to the principal seat of learning in Europe. Our own Oxford, though more ancient as a seat of learning than Paris, had not yet attained its subsequent celebrity. It was a strong and fair city, with its castle rising high in the midst of the streams which all but surrounded it,¹ but it was then rather too warlike to be a great seat of learning, and had to stand many a siege before it attained to its eminence. Nor, indeed, was Oxford ever the intellectual centre of *Europe*, as was Paris ; as the archbishop of Canterbury was “the Pope of the farther world,” so had Oxford a world of its own, with intellects as active and as penetrating as any which ruled the schools on the continent. But Paris had, even in Gilbert’s time, its four nations, one of which included even the far east.² To Paris then, and not to Oxford, came Gilbert ; and he might, had it pleased him, have found food enough for his curiosity, for the quarrels between Realists and Nominalists had begun already to be heard in the schools of Paris. Roscelinus, the opponent of St. Anselm, had taught in Paris ; and there was a person then in France whose name has spread wider than that of the heretical head of the Nominalists. Peter Abelard was still a young man, though probably about ten years older than Gilbert. The career of the two youths was, however, to be very different ; the terms of the schools are banished from the life of Gilbert ; it is not known who was his master, whether Bernard of Chartres, or William of Champeaux, or Abelard himself. Not but that he was, in after times, a distinguished

Gilbert’s life uses Neustria. John of Salisbury, when he relates his going abroad to study, says that he went in Gallias, and it only appears incidentally that he means Paris.—*Metalog.* i. 10.

¹ *Gesta Stephani.* p. 958.

² *Bulæus*, vol. ii. 666.

teacher in England, but it was not God's will that intellect should be the most prominent part of his character. All that is said of his studies at the school of Paris is, that he made up by his diligence for the waste of his early years, and "received an abundant talent of learning." But it proved to be a good school of discipline for him, and a marked change took place in his character; he had to struggle with poverty, for his father, notwithstanding all his riches, gave but a poor maintenance to the son who had disappointed him. Again, amidst all the dangers which surrounded him, by a severe purity, he offered up his body as a sacrifice to the Lord, and thus the grace of God trained him for that work which he was destined to perform in the Church.

It is not known how long he remained at Paris, but he came back to England with the degree of master and license to teach.¹ He was not of those who remained on the mountain of St. Genevieve, disputing over and over again on the old questions, who were to be found by their friends after many a long year not a whit advanced from the point where they started. Nor did he repair, as did many scholars in those days to Salerno, to exercise afterwards the more profitable art of medicine. Nor again did he seek the courts of king or prelate to make his fortune. He did not even seek the cloister, much less there, as saith the² quiet satirist of the schools, carry his proud heart under the hood of St. Benedict and exempt himself from conventual discipline, by keeping his old profession. He went back to England, to his old home in his father's house, and opened a school, or, to give him his proper title, he became a regent master.

¹ John of Salisbury, ii. 10.

² Ibid. Metalog. i. 4.

At this time, a schoolmaster was a man of great importance ; his person was as inviolable as that of of a clerk,¹ and he was considered as a half ecclesiastical personage. This office was a passport to the favour of kings and to ecclesiastical dignity. Two rulers of the schools of Bec, at this time successively sat on the throne of Canterbury ; Geoffrey, the schoolmaster of St. Katherine's, became Abbot of St. Alban's, where a² large library had lately been laid up in the painted cupboards by Paul, the first Norman Abbot, and a whole manor set apart for its maintenance. The education of the country was then carried on by the old schools which had been connected with the monasteries and the cathedrals and other churches.³ No one could teach without a license, and this was to be obtained from any master who himself was the ruler of a school.⁴ Sometimes a secular ruled the school of the monks, and a monk might rule a secular school,⁵ but all were under the control and patronage of the church, as the decrees for their protection testify, and it was considered almost simony to exact money for a

¹ Laws of Edw. the Conf. ap Wilkins, vol. 1. p. 310.

² Matt. Paris, pp. 1007 and 1036.

³ The decree of the council of Lateran, mentions other churches besides the cathedrals. Saxon cathedral schools are mentioned at the end of the tenth century.—Wilkins i. 265.

⁴ It does not seem that at first any master whatever could give a license, at least in France, for it seems likely from a rescript of Alexander III., that the masters of the cathedral schools claimed the privilege of granting licenses, and the cause mentioned by John of Salisbury, letter 19, implies a monopoly within a certain district. The chancellor of the university of Paris is expressly allowed by Alexander to exact a fee, which also seems to give him a monopoly.

⁵ Matt. Par. pp. 1007, 1039. St. Anselm, Ep. i. 30.

presentation to a school, and no one could even let his school to another master. The universities were continually sending forth masters, who set up unendowed schools for themselves ; and the church soon after this, in Pope Alexander III's. time, strengthened the hands of the old schools, by ordaining that each cathedral chapter should set apart a benefice for the master of the school, "because the church of God, as a pious mother, is bound to provide for the poor, lest the opportunity of reading and improving themselves be taken away from them." At the same time, the same pope¹ encourages to the utmost the establishment of new schools, where the masters would necessarily be paid by the scholars, by forbidding under an anathema any cathedral dignitary from exacting money for a license, from any one who wished to set up a school, provided he were only competent.

Such was the situation in which Gilbert was now placed ; he had found his way back to the home of his youth, where he had lived neglected and despised, but he was now a much more important person than when he left it, and was considered by his father as a degenerate son. Now the whole country round, from a great distance, came to hear the new doctor from Paris. Not only boys were put under his charge and young men became his hearers, but girls and maidens also came to be instructed by him. Females were not behindhand in the intellectual enthusiasm of the period. Learning was a romantic quest, an unknown land, in which even females might go forth and make discoveries. The well known Heloise

¹ Council of London A. D. 1138.

² Rescript p. 2. c. 18. ap. Mansi.

will occur to every body, and the daughters of Mane-gold a schoolman, celebrated in his day, taught philosophy to those of their own sex. Here then Gilbert found himself in a situation of great responsibility. The obscure township of Sempringham had suddenly, through his means, sprung up into an extensive school. His father no longer looked upon him as an unworthy scion, and found that he might be usefully and even honourably employed without breaking bones at tournaments, or hunting and hawking over his lands. He therefore, instead of leaving him to glean a precarious subsistence from his pupils, supported him out of his possessions, and this enabled Gilbert to assume an authority over his scholars, which he could not otherwise have maintained. He walked about in a dress becoming the son of the lord of Sempringham, but all the while he was in heart a monk, and he began immediately to form his pupils into an association, which might save them from the dangers to which their situation exposed them. Not content with teaching them the trivium and quadrivium, he became their spiritual guide, and subjected them to a species of monastic discipline. Knowing how a breath may spoil the beautiful innocence of childhood, and yet how easily holy discipline may shut out the knowledge of evil till the soul is strong enough to fight against it, he taught them to consecrate the whole day to God. The male children slept altogether in a dormitory, where all might be controlled; he taught them reverence at church, and at certain times and places, a religious silence was observed, and they had stated times for study and prayer. He was now happier than he had ever been before, beloved and honoured in his own

home, and the guide of happy children and of a band of youths and maidens, who praised the Lord under his direction.

CHAPTER II.

The Rectory.

HE was not long however to enjoy this peace ; two new churches were founded in his father's lands at Sempringham and Tirington. It does not appear whether Sir Joceline was himself the founder of them, at all events he conceived that the right of presentation belonged to him, and he nominated his son to the vacant churches. It was much against his will that he accepted the charge ; he knew that it would probably be disputed, and a lawsuit was of all things the most opposed to his character. On the other hand, he thought it his duty to defend his father's rights, and as the cause would come before an ecclesiastical tribunal and under the cognizance of the bishop, he could have no scruple in accepting the benefice, if it were given in his favour. A long lawsuit followed, as he had expected. If ever there was a system in confusion it was the parochial system of England at the Conquest. It had been introduced amongst us later than in any other of the existing kingdoms in Europe, and traces existed even after the conquest of the old division of church property by the bishop himself among his clergy ; Lanfranc for instance, and William of St. Carilefe, bishop of Durham, were the first in their respective sees to separate the bishop's lands from those of the monks of the cathedral, who originally performed the functions

of the parish priests. Thus the parishes in England were in that most dangerous of states, a state of transition ; at first, matters are generally clear and simple, and then comes an intermediate state, when questions arise and everything is vague and floating, till evils and abuses compel authority to step in. At first all was in the hands of the bishop, and then the nobleman must have a private chapel, or oratory, as it was called, and nothing was more natural than that he should appoint his own chaplain, subject to the bishop's approval. Afterwards, he began to find it too much to pay both chaplain and parish-priest, and a law was necessary to force him to pay tithe to the mother church.¹ Out of these chapels often arose parish churches where there were none, and so the chapelry became a benefice, and the nobleman the patron. Or else the lord of a manor founded or endowed a church, and then the grateful church gave him the patronage, which became hereditary in his family or attached to the land. But a far different sort of patronage soon sprung up ; church property was too tempting, and lay too much at the mercy of a strong hand, not to be exposed to the rapacity of an unscrupulous noble. The defenceless church was ever a convenient fund whence earl and baron drew money, whether a fortification was to be constructed, or a body of armed men fitted out.² Sometimes a portion of the church lands were made over on a long lease to some powerful baron, who, with his good sword, was to clear them of a nest of robbers, lurking in the woods, or to defend the church in times of danger.³ These lands but too often never came back to

¹ *Leges Eccl. Canuti*. Wilkins *Concil.* p. 302.

² *III. Lat. council*, canon 19.

³ *Matt. Paris*, 998.

the church. In other cases some benefactor or his descendant repented of his or his ancestor's liberality, and resumed what had been solemnly given over to the service of God. In the time of the Danes almost all the parish churches north of the Thames¹ had been destroyed, and when the foot-prints of the invader had passed away, the nobles took possession of the lands and kept them in their own hands. Church lands were thus passed on from father to son, like any other manor belonging to the lord, and were given as a dowry on the marriage of a daughter, and of course the right of presentation passed on with the possession.² A miserable pittance out of the tithes and produce was paid to some priest who was appointed to serve the church, and the rest belonged to the lord. The clergy themselves were by no means exempt from blame; the servile chaplain would come into the lord and lady's chamber and profane the most holy mysteries by saying mass to them in their bed. Sometimes the clergy themselves were the spoilers of the church; most of the Saxon priests were married, and livings often became a family inheritance, enjoyed in a direct line by the son after the father. Even in later times, in Normandy, mere children were sometimes put in possession of ecclesiastical benefices.³ The right of presentation was sold like any other right belonging to the land, and that with the connivance of bishops.⁴ Such was the miserable state of England before the conquest, and the very improvement of affairs brought with it its own

¹ Palgrave's Anglo-Saxon Const. p. 167.

² For an instance of the advocatio or presentation passing on with an unjust possession, v. Matt. of Paris, p. 1016.

³ Council of Avranches, 1172.

⁴ John of Salisbury, de Nug. Cur. 7. 17.

troubles. Parish churches sprung up every where,¹ and men, women, and children, might often be seen winding up the little pathway through the fields, to the sound of the merry bells, where never church had been before. But then first, the rights of the old parish were to be respected, and it was ordered that on some high festival, the priests of the new churches should go every year in procession, with cross and banner, to the mother church. Again, the rights of patrons were to be settled ; and it is said, that in England and Sweden these matters were in greater confusion than any where else. Certain it is, that when, in the third Lateran council, the church stepped in to settle the law of patronage, more rescripts on the subject were addressed by Pope Alexander III. to England, than to any other country.

It is not surprising then, that Sir Joceline of Sempringham should have had a lawsuit about the right of patronage. Even in those turbulent days men had recourse to law as well as now ; and quibbles too about seals and charters were common, as when the Lincoln men objected to the Abbot of St. Alban's that the charters of the abbey had no seal,² and it was answered that in good king Offa's time, a golden cross was used instead of the pendant seal which the Confessor introduced. It does not however appear, what was the objection made to Gilbert's father. It appears likely from the terms used by Gilbert when he instituted the priory, that the church lands belonged to him not only as rector, but as lord of the manor, inherited from his father, and this may have been the grounds on which

¹ *Leges Regis Edwardi ap. Wilkins.*

² *Matt. Paris, 1026.*

his father's right was questioned. A change had taken place in Sempringham since the Domesday survey, for it was now in the hundred of Alveton, and belonged to Gilbert of Ghent, who held it free of taxes of the king, which does not seem to have been the case at the time when the survey was taken. Of this nobleman, Sir Joceline held it as the mesne lord,¹ and it may be that it was doubted whether the presentation belonged to him or to Gilbert of Ghent.² Or else, it may be, that the title of these new comers to the lands themselves appeared to be rather of might than right. However this be, the lawsuit was decided in Gilbert's favour, and he was accordingly canonically instituted by the bishop of Lincoln, as rector of the parishes of Sempringham and Tirington. He was not in orders at the time when he became possessed of these livings; he therefore appointed a chaplain to serve the church in his room, and there was nothing irregular in this proceeding, for a license was allowed to students to hold ecclesiastical benefices without being as yet ordained.³

¹ This appears from the fact, that Gilbert of Ghent gave the land to St. Gilbert to found his priory, and is said in the charter to have been a tenant *in capite*. The dominium of the land, is said indeed to have belonged to Sir Joceline, but it appears that "domain" was applied to the manor of a mesne lord, v. Ellis's Index to Domesday, i. 230. The under-tenants of a nobleman were sometimes called barones.—Orderic, p. 589.

² A somewhat similar cause is decided in a rescript of Alexander III. in which it appears that a controversy had arisen between the nunnery of Wilton, and a knight who had a lease of a part of the lands, concerning the right of presentation to a church situated on the land.

³ In rescript of Alexander III. p. xv. c. l., non-residence is allowed *studio literarum*. As late as council of Rouen, 1231, the alternative is allowed to clerks possessing benefices, either

It was a beautiful sight, the parish of Sempringham under the rule of its youthful rector. His was a gentle rule, for he was himself under obedience, and such men are ever calm and disciplined in their manners, and meek in heart. He subjected himself in all things to his chaplain, who was his confessor and spiritual guide. Being master of the school, the education of his parishioners came naturally under his controul, and he catechised and taught them with unwearied diligence. He taught them the holy mysteries of religion through the external rites of the church ; he knew well how the sweet service of the church soothes and softens down the rough hearts of rustics ; he taught them early to reverence the house of God as the abode of angels, and above all the temple, on the altar of which was reserved the adorable sacrament. He humanized the minds of the simple peasantry by this teaching, and filled them with a religious awe, so that it is said that a parishioner of Sempringham could at once be known from any other by his reverential air on entering a church. At first he lived among his parishioners in the village itself of Sempringham. He, with his chaplain, had a lodging in the house where dwelt the father of a family¹ with his wife and children. The

of being ordained or betaking themselves to the study of theology. Vicarii or curates (otherwise called capellani) are recognized by Alexander III., and the rights of the rectors, to whom they were bound by oath, protected against them.—v. Rescripts, p. xxxix. Even a lay-rector is protected against his curate, though he is ordered to be ordained. See also councils of Tours and of London, 1163, and 1175. A great laxity had been tolerated previous to the Lateran council, and Alexander allowed a person who had been instituted before the age of fifteen, to keep his benefice on that ground.—Rescript, p. xxiii. 5.

¹ Paterfamilias, the House-bonde.—v. Palgrave, p. 16.

chaplain must have found himself in a new situation, for it was not often that the poor Anglo-Saxon priest was thus treated by the lay-rector of the living ; and the son of the lord of the manor did not often abase himself to dwell in the house of the churl. Gilbert however found here more happiness than he had done in his father's hall ; he was now in his vocation winning souls to God, working among the poor of the earth. The daughter of the householder with whom he dwelt was a holy and devout maiden, whose modest graces endeared her to the hearts of all the villagers. She was Gilbert's scholar, and was growing up beneath his eye in simplicity and holiness. God however did not allow him to dwell long beneath this peaceful roof. One night he dreamed that he had laid his hand upon the maiden's bosom, and was prevented by some strange power from again withdrawing it. On awaking he trembled, for he feared lest God had warned him by this dream that he was on the verge of evil. He was utterly unconscious of the danger, but he revealed the temptation and the dream to his confessor, and asked him his opinion. The priest, in return, confessed that the same feeling had come over him ; the result was, that they resolved to quit the neighbourhood of what might become danger. Gilbert had never wittingly connected evil with the pure and holy being before him ; but his heart misgave him, and he went away. He knew that chastity was too bright and glorious a jewel to risk the loss of it ; no man may think himself secure ; an evil look or thought indulged in, have sometimes made the first all at once to become the last ; therefore the greatest saints have placed strictest guard upon the slightest thought, word, and action. Even the spotless and ever-virgin Mary

trembled when she saw the angel enter her chamber.¹ And He, who was infinitely more than sinless by grace, even by nature impeccable, because He was the Lord from heaven, He has allowed it to be recorded that his disciples wondered that he talked with a woman. All the actions of our blessed Lord are most real, for He had taken upon Himself the very reality of our flesh of the substance of the Virgin Mary ; but each action is also most highly significant and symbolical, so that, though all conduce to our great glory, yet all may be a warning to us in our greatest shame. Thus, though it would be unutterable blasphemy to connect with Him the possibility of sin, yet by this little act He has been graciously pleased to leave us an example, that as we should keep a dove-like purity of eye and thought, we should also, for the love of God, brave the scandal of evil tongues. And Gilbert imitated his blessed Lord, for though he fled from the very thought of danger, he still continued to guide her by his counsel ; she does not disappear from the history, and by and bye we shall see that the dream might have another meaning. After he left this house, he dwelt in a chamber constructed over the porch of the parish-church of St. Andrew, at Sempringham. He scarcely ever left this holy place, but was either occupied in prayer in the church itself, or teaching his school, or catechizing his parishioners. His scholars, though still seculars, continued to live all but as monks under his guidance ; and the care which he took in forming their minds and in ruling his parish, left him but little time to himself. He was not an idle ruler, nor did his sweetness of manner prevent his exertion of his authority wherever it was necessary. None know how

¹ St. Ambr. in Luc.

to be angry but those who can be angry with calmness, as our Lord when He made a whip of cords and drove out them that sold doves, and overturned the tables of the money-changers. On one occasion, one of his parishioners, when he had reaped his land, laid all the rich corn in his barn, without giving thanks to God, and separating the tenth part for the church. He was chuckling over his fraud, and thinking that the rector was much too simple to find it out, and much too spiritual to care for it, if he did. But he was mistaken, for not only did the rector find out the fraud, but he made him take all the corn out of his barn and count it before him sheaf by sheaf ; and then he collected together the tenth part, and heaping it up in the midst of the village, burnt it all in open day, in the sight of the wondering rustics. They then learned to know Gilbert better, and found, that though he cared but little about his own rights, he would not allow the church of God, which he represented, to lose a tittle of her dues.

CHAPTER III.

The Bishop's Palace.

A PARISIAN doctor was, however, too great a personage to be left in the little village of Sempringham ; he was not destined to remain long in peace with his scholars and parishioners. Robert Bloet, his diocesan, the bishop of Lincoln, sent for him, made him a clerk, by conferring on him one of the minor orders, and bade him live in his household. What sort of life he was likely to lead at this time, and why he was sent for, may be guessed at, because it is known what sort of a man the bishop himself was. It is to be hoped that he

was a sadder and a wiser man than he had been, when he sent for Gilbert. He had been chancellor of England under William Rufus, by whom he was made bishop of Lincoln, and under Henry I. High Justiciar ; he was a man whose exterior was formed to win all hearts, and whose eloquent tongue and talents for business had enabled him to gain the favour of the wild and stormy William, as well as the smooth and unscrupulous Henry. His career runs parallel with St. Anselm's, for both were appointed by William Rufus, in that good mood which sickness brought upon him, but the career of the two prelates soon separated. It would be needless to follow them ; suffice it to say that Robert found to his cost that it was easier to rule the Red King, when the wild fit was on him, than to escape the more dangerous anger of Henry. The king had been beaten by the saint, and probably loved not those ministers who had helped him to his defeat. He turned round on the bishop of Lincoln, and contrived to find a charge against him by which he was stripped of much of his wealth. Then when his knights were dismissed and his glittering train of noble pages gone, and his gold and silver vessels broken up, he looked round on his almost empty halls, on the shaven crowns and sober dresses of his clerks, and rough sheep-skin dresses of his serving-men, and burst into tears. Bitterly then must he have repented of his cowardice, when, with the other three bishops, he said to the bold Saint, that his holiness was above them, and that he must go on his way alone, for the love of kindred and of the world had wound round their hearts too tightly to allow them to follow.¹ Bitterly must he have wept over the time when he consecrated the abbots, who

¹ Eadmer ap Anselm. ed. Ben. pp. 4, 7, 65.

had received investiture from Henry's hand. It was at this time, probably, that he sent for Gilbert, that his gentle hand might soothe him in his desolation and penitence. The close of the prelate's busy life was at hand ; one day some one wished to comfort him by repeating some words of praise, with which the king had honoured him in his absence. But he knew the crafty king too well to trust him, and said with a sigh : the king praises none of his servants but those whom he would utterly smite down.¹ A few days after he went to Woodstock, where Henry was holding high festival with a number of nobles, and the curious beasts which he had collected from foreign lands ; as the prelate was walking with the king and the bishop of Salisbury, he fell down in a fit of apoplexy and never spoke more.

Gilbert's mission at the episcopal palace of Lincoln did not, however, stop here, and he had probably a harder part to play with Alexander, who succeeded to the bishopric, than with his broken-hearted predecessor. He was the nephew of the greatest prelate in England, that Roger of Salisbury, whom Henry I., when his fortunes were at the lowest, took into his service, as a poor priest, at Caen. Henry, when he became king of England, did not forget his old companion in poverty, and it was a fine thing to be the nephew of Roger, for he had at his disposal whatever he chose to ask for. Alexander was brought up in his palace, and unhappily imbibed a taste for splendour and for architecture. Had he stopped when he re-built his cathedral, and vaulted it with stone, it had been well ; but, unfortunately, he loved military architecture as well as

¹ Henry of Huntingdon, ap. Wharton. p. ii. p. 695.

ecclesiastical. At Newark, a stately castle was built by him on a hill, which stretched its green and flowery slope above the river Trent ;¹ at Sleaford and Banbury, two more castles kept watch over his extensive diocese. This might have been allowed during Henry's reign ; he would much rather have seen castles in the hands of his bishops than of the nobles, whom the policy of his whole reign tended to humble. He knew well that the lance was a much safer weapon in a bishop's hands, than the pastoral staff. Stephen, his successor, was not so politic ; kings loved to reduce their prelates to the state of feudal barons, but there was rather too much feudality in three good castles of stone, besides that of Devizes, said to be the finest of Europe, belonging to Alexander's uncle of Salisbury. He determined to take the castles into his own custody, and the bishops soon gave him an opportunity. They would ride about with armed retainers, and men with arms in their hands will quarrel, so when in 1139 they came to Oxford, to a council held by the king, the soldiers of the bishops fought with those of Alan of Brittany, about the lodgings assigned to their masters. Much blood was shed, and one soldier killed, but at last the bishops won the day, and the earl was beaten. Stephen seized upon this pretext, and bade the bishops give up their castles, as a hostage for their good behaviour. On their refusal, he seized the prelates, and kept them in custody. Soon after, he took Alexander with him to Newark, and, as he had done before to Roger, he declared that till the castle was surrendered, no food should pass the bishop's lips. With tears did Alexan-

¹ Vernantissimum florida compositione Henric. Huntin. lib. 8, p. 389.

der implore his own garrison to yield his fair castle, and with no less wretchedness, did he see the king's soldiers marching up the green slope, and entering the gate of his stronghold, and before he had turned his back upon it, the royal standard of England floated on its walls. The issue of the preceding contest, about investitures, had taught men that the office of the bishop was totally distinct from that of the temporal lord : as a lord, he might do homage, but the ring and the staff could not come from an earthly king. If, therefore, English prelates would now sink the bishop in the baron, they must pay the penalty. Stephen afterwards pleaded in council, that he had starved Roger, not as bishop, but as his own servant.

We have here somewhat anticipated the history, in order to show this Bishop's character ; Alexander was taught a severe lesson, and meddled no more with military matters. As, however, Gilbert had ceased to be an inmate in the bishop's palace before his misfortunes, he must have dwelt in the bishop's court at Lincoln, in the height of its magnificence. His eyes must have been dazzled with the glittering of burnished armour, mixing in the splendid pageant with the cope of the ecclesiastic, while the cross preceded the bishop and the lance brought up the rear ; his ears were bewildered with the clang of trumpets and the ringing of steel. What was he to do in the midst of such a court ? And yet, strange to say, he was in high favour with both Robert and Alexander. Evil is mixed up with good in Christ's church, like the cross, and the weapons of the world, in Alexander's retinue. Gilbert, going about this splendid house in his plain clerical apparel, was the representative of the cross. Such was his intimacy with the bishop, that he slept in the

same chamber with him. Where could have been his vigils and his fasts at the sumptuous tables and in the magnificent bedchamber of Alexander? He managed to contrive both; he said himself, with a reproachful tone, after he became a monk, that when he was in the bishop's palace he used to tame his flesh by more fasts, prayers, and spiritual exercises, than he ever could compass afterwards. Sometimes the inmates of the palace found that he was too good to suit them, as for instance, the clerk, who after once reciting the office with him, found that he lengthened the service so much by frequently bowing his knees to the ground, that, says Gilbert's biographer, "he swore that he would never pray with him again." One day a prelate came on a visit to the episcopal palace at Lincoln, and shared the chamber where the bishop, and Gilbert of Sempringham, slept. The strange bishop tossed upon his couch and could not sleep; his eye wandered about the darkened room, enlightened only by the glimmering of a taper. All on a sudden, he saw a shadow moving quickly up and down on the opposite wall. He gazed on it in fear for some time, but at last mustering courage, he rose and stealthily approached. He found to his surprise Gilbert awake and in prayer, sometimes standing, sometimes on his knees, raising his hands to heaven in earnest supplication. The bishop shrunk back to his couch, and next morning he smilingly accused his brother of Lincoln of having a mountebank in his room to dance to him at night. Strange is the approximation of good and evil in those days of faith; perhaps it was then more frequent than it is now, or rather from the greatness of the good the evil came out in greater contrast and in an exaggerated form. Gilbert and Alexander of Lincoln lying side by side!

And yet, stranger perhaps is the mixture of good and evil in the same heart. In the pages of history various personages float before us and appear as the types of certain principles ; yet, when by chance we can look upon them close, we find them not so bad. Thus Alexander to us is the mere worldly prelate ; he appears, as he was called in the Roman court, only as the magnificent Alexander. Yet there was a struggle in his heart too, and Gilbert was to him as his good angel. He insisted on his being ordained priest, and almost by force the awful power of the priesthood was conferred on Gilbert. The bishop's next step showed his just appreciation of his powers and turn of mind. The din of Nominalism and Realism had sounded about Gilbert in vain, without producing any impression ; abstract questions could not awaken his mind ; but put before him a case of conscience or of spiritual direction, he would grapple with it at once. The bishop accordingly made him, as far as we can make out the vague terms of his biographer, a sort of penitentiary¹ of the diocese. At times, Alexander himself, with all his worldliness, knelt at his feet in the confessional. A man who seeks a severe confessor, cannot be wholly bad, and though Gilbert, as we shall see, left him still in the midst of his grandeur, there is proof that in the day of adversity, he had not forgotten the church of St. Andrew at Sempringham, or its holy rector.

Gilbert's work now lay among the sins and wickednesses of mankind ; the worst and most horrid forms

¹ The first general institution of a penitentiary, was at the fourth Lateran council, 1215, but it appears from Thomassin, that particular dioceses in earlier times had their penitentiaries. Vet. et. nov. disc. i. 2. c. 10.

of sin came under his cognizance, for of this nature were those reserved for the jurisdiction of the bishop, whose representative he was. To him also the clergy of the diocese referred all cases of difficulty, which occurred in the practice of the confessional. This required both learning and experience ; instead of his little churches of Sempringham and Tirington, he had the whole diocese of Lincoln for his parish. To decide the cases which came before him, in his day, probably was more difficult than it would have been in the next century. He lived only on the verge of the age of systems. Canon law had not been compiled by Gratian ; no one had as yet professed it at Paris, nor had master Vacarius lectured at Oxford ;¹ appeals to Rome were but just in England taking the legal and precise form,² finally fixed by Alexander III. And yet canons are as old as the first council of Jerusalem, recorded in the Acts, and appeals to Rome have been since Athanasius threw himself and his cause on Pope Julius ; so too, the germs of casuistry existed in the old penitentials, though Christian morals had not yet been moulded into a science by St. Thomas. Gilbert had only the more difficult task to fulfil ; the tremendous power of the keys was chiefly delegated to him by the bishop, and he had so much the less to guide him in its exercise. What are the difficulties in casuistry, it is hard for those to tell to whom its existence is unknown. All appears smooth to him who hardly knows that he has a conscience, so little does he exercise it ; so also, the difficulties of the con-

¹ Gerv. Act. Pont. Cant. ap Twysden, p. 1665. Chron. Norm. ap Duchesne, p. 983.

² Ibid. and Henr. Huntin. lib. viii. p. 226. Script. post. Bed.

fessional can only be known to him who is practised in it. Gilbert had to frame for himself, the rules of that art created by Christianity, which has sin for its subject matter, with all the sickening details of the wickedness of the human soul, that wonderful art which is founded on Christ's divine command, Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted. Christian morals has, from its very nobleness, many difficulties in practice ; this, however, is an imperfection incident to the highest human sciences, and their professors cannot consistently urge it as an objection against this one, which is divine. It has to do with subjects to which language is inadequate, and which thought can hardly compass, and yet it is a real science, which can be taken to pieces and viewed on all sides, and drawn out at length, and be systematized, and made consistent. It has its definitions and its axioms, its premises and its deductions. But though to define a venial sin may be easy, yet to tell it in practice from one that is mortal, may be difficult. The broken language of a penitent is hard to interpret ; and all the dark labyrinths of a wicked heart hard to disentangle. Cases are infinitely varied in practice, for the hideous forms of guilt are infinite, and many of them may come across theories, however clearly drawn out. If it be hard to tell how to rectify a complicated disease of the body, what must it be when, by external symptoms, men try to judge of the complex motives of a human heart, jostling and crossing each other in every direction ? Christianity, while it has exalted, has rendered the science of morals more complex. As Christ, on the mount, delivered a new code, so the Church has created new virtues and new crimes, possible only in Christianity, as, for instance, simony and heresy. This may help us to understand Gilbert's functions, all but

the highest that could be on earth. His eye had to look curiously into the putrid sores of the human soul, and his heart must have often sunk within him ; yet he had the power to cleanse them. He was a physician, as well as a judge. Truly it is the order of priesthood which makes Christian history to differ from Pagan. The history of Christendom is a terrible scene ; in reading its records of wholesale simony and petty jobbing, of bold crime and coward virtue, we are tempted to say, "in what respect is the world changed ?" But looking for a moment on Christian times, even with the cold eye of an historian, they have this remarkable difference from those which preceded them, that all through, there exists a body of men, the ministers of a kingdom, standing beside the kingdoms of the earth, with laws of its own, and resting entirely on invisible sanctions, the meanest of them claiming in his own sphere to be above an earthly king, and at whose feet kings may kneel. These men, again, are not an hereditary caste ; they are cut off from earthly ties ; they have only the usufruct of their property, and a stranger possesses it after them. These are the men who constitute Christianity, as far as it is a visible system ; take away the independence of its jurisdiction, and the power of its priests, to all external appearance at least, Christendom, is merged in the world. It was this compact system which Gilbert had now in a great measure to wield in the diocese of Lincoln, as the bishop's representative. This is priestcraft proper, and a gentle craft it is. It can keep the soul of the child pure from sin, or crush it in the bud ; preserve the young man chaste as a maiden, and heal the wounds in the soul of a hardened sinner.

CHAPTER IV.

The Nunnery.

WHAT all this while has become of Gilbert's two parishes of Sempringham and Tirington? Was his school broken up, and were his scholars dispersed? His chronicler says nothing about it, but, as will appear in the sequel, he certainly kept up his communication with his favourite pupils. The whole of the revenues of Tirington he gave up, absolutely out of his hands; and out of those of Sempringham, he took but what was really necessary, bestowing the rest entirely upon the poor. Though the bishop's command and the office which he held, must have taken away all scruple from his mind as to non-residence, still he was too poor in spirit to derive more from his benefice than the mere necessities of life. His heart was not at rest in Alexander's palace; the baron and the bishop were far too much identified to suit him. The trumpet of the cavalier ever and anon broke in sharply, on the cathedral chant and the song of the choir. Besides, in any bishop's palace he would not have been in his element. He was a true parish priest, and the rude rafters of his own little church, suited him far better than the stone vault of the cathedral. His heart was with the rustics whom he had taught, and whose minds he had refined by his instructions; he loved the wild fens, where the poor Saxon still lurked, better than the episcopal city. His plans had all been broken up when the bishop's command had called him away from Sempringham, and he had only submitted to leave it, in obedience to the will of God. His heart yearned for the youths and maid-

ens, whom he had taught in his school, and for his village children, and the rude husbandmen and housewives whose souls he had raised from the dust, to which many a long year of toil had well-nigh bound them. In addition to this, he seems to have felt a growing conviction that with such a bishop as Alexander, he could do nothing where he was. The secular clergy had never yet recovered from the wretched state in which the Norman invasion had found them ; and however gradual and merciful had been the introduction of the law of celibacy among them, still the canons of the councils at the time show plainly that the new state of things sat uneasily upon them. They still wanted their hereditary benefices, and that continual progress towards the secularization of church property, to which the Saxon church had been tending. The grave and august idea of a body of unmarried clergy, is with difficulty grasped by those on whom it is binding, hard as it is to eradicate it, when once it has taken root. Flagrant disorders had therefore broken out among the clergy, which required new and stringent laws to repress them. Alexander was present at the council which met to reform the church in 1127, but a splendid and a military prelate was not the man to enforce the strict provisions of such an assembly. Gilbert seems to have felt this bitterly. One of the seven archdeaconries of Lincoln was offered to him by Alexander, probably soon after this very council of London. Its sixth canon had solemnly conjured all archdeacons to assist in enforcing celibacy, as was their duty, and Gilbert felt that this high office was one which his shoulders could not bear. The archdeacons of Lincoln were great men ; and one of them is said by Henry of Huntingdon, to be “ the richest of all the

archdeacons now in England." But Gilbert loved poverty too well to be a princely churchman, and he refused the office, saying, at the same time, that he knew no quicker way to perdition. He felt himself totally unfit to rule so many ; his path, he thought, lay among the poor of the earth, among simple rustics and children ; but he trembled at the thought of being set on high among the clergy, with power to chastise. The Bishop seeing him so much in earnest, gave up the point.

It appears to have been not long after this, and about the year 1130, that he left the bishop's palace altogether.¹ The immediate cause of his departure is not known. That the step did not alienate Alexander from him is evident from the uniform support which he ever after received from the bishop. He went back to his parish with the greatest joy ; he found much alteration in his old friends. The young girl whom he had left in her father's house, was now a grown-up maiden. He himself was changed also : he went away a layman, but he was now a priest, and his parishioners were now properly his flock, whom he could feed with his own hand, and not by another's. Besides this, he had many years' experience in the confessional, and the guidance of souls. The habits of purity and austerity which he had ever practised, had now become invigorated by years, and his character for sanctity had been spread abroad by his high station, so as to be well-nigh above

¹ It appears that he left it in the reign of Henry I., for his biographer says that the nunnery was founded by him in that reign. As Henry died in 1135, he probably quitted Lincoln a few years before that time. The Derby annals bring it nearer, by fixing the date of the nunnery at 1131. It probably was between 1127 and 1131.

the reach of scandal. It should also be observed, that from the fact which he himself states, of the large patrimony which had fallen to his lot, his father must have died between his return from Paris, and the time of which we are now writing. He was, therefore, lord of the manor of Sempringham, and a rich man. From the terms which he uses,¹ it also appears that the power which he had over his parish churches was very great. It may be, that the church lands were in the hands of his family ; at all events, he was the patron, as well as the incumbent of the living. Possessed, as he was, also, of the favour of one of the most powerful prelates in England, what might he not hope to do, with wealth and power in his hands ? He had long made up his mind to give up all for Christ's sake ; the only question was, how it was to be done. Father and mother were dead, and he was alone in the world ; for it does not appear that he had either brother or sister. His whole thoughts were concentrated in his spiritual children ; and they were to him father and mother, and brethren and sisters. For their use, he intended to give up his patrimony, and to restore the churches of Sempringham and Tirington, absolutely into the hands of the church, which, during his father's life, he could not do. His intimacy with the bishop left him very much the choice of the mode of so doing, and he waited quietly God's time, till he could see how it could best be done. He certainly had no deep views on the subject ; and the foundation of an order appears never to have entered his head. With all its deep self-devotion, his mind was of a quiet and a homely cast. Indeed, his was, in all respects, if we may so say, a homely lot ; his parish

¹ He says that he wishes "*mancipare divino cultui ecclesias,*" which he possessed "*libera possessione.*"

was the home of his childhood, and his parishioners were those whose familiar faces he had known, even when, a neglected boy in his father's house, he was so little like the heir to the lands and the manor ; the youths and the maidens whom he was now guiding, were the first favourite pupils of his school. His character, therefore, is a specimen of one which seldom appears in the history of the times, and which yet must be taken into the account, if we would understand them. It is quite true, that they were times of romance ; the history of most monasteries would probably be what is called romantic. As, in the world, rapine and violence, and clever fraud, were the order of the day, so also, in religion, the great and mighty good by which God overthrew wickedness, was often done, as it were, by fits and starts, by a holy violence, which took heaven and earth by force. The whole structure of society was framed on a notion of law, partially restraining physical force, and yet legalizing it, by bringing it under its cognizance. Thus the legal trial by battle, which, be it remembered, sometimes decided ecclesiastical causes,¹ was but the law interposing, to regulate what would be sure to have taken place, without its interposition. So again, the monastic rule was the regulation of the self-devotion with which God inspired holy men and women, who thirsted for a more perfect way. Hence, side by side with the charter of the monastery, would often be its history, telling how there once dwelt in the greenwood an outlaw, and as he slept on a grassy knoll, among his merry men, under the trees, in the summer time, God, in his mercy, sent him a vision, and he left his followers and became a hermit,

¹ Matt. Par. p. 1053.

in the place where, afterwards, the abbey was built.¹ And these stories were very often the real truth, though at other times they were legends—that is, truth, mixed with falsehood. At the same time, it should always be remembered, that as, besides the romantic side of things, there were law and custom, and deep policy in the affairs of the world, so also, the Church was a compact and an orderly body, with its rules of holy obedience, its laws and canons. It had its quiet parish-priests, and to this class, to all appearance, Gilbert was to the end of life to belong. England had, it is true, its secluded nooks and its vast forests, where earl or baron,² as he rode through its depths, winding his horn in the merry chace, would light on a holy hermit, clad in skins, serving God in the hole of the rock ; but it had besides, its green meadows and noiseless streams, with the willows on their banks, and the miller's pool, and all the tame scenery which meets us now-a-days. Gilbert's lot seemed likely to be cast in with those whose good deeds are confined to one little spot ; but the quiet brook often widens into the broad river, and our Lord willed that this lowly tree, planted by the water side, should bear fruit an hundred-fold.

His first thought was to establish a monastery in the parish, and to connect it with the parish church. It was to be the head-quarters of religion at Sempringham, and the visible centre, round which all religious associations would cling. In this way alone, could the wild and untamed vices of the rude people be cured ; human nature can hardly believe that its strong passions can be restrained at all, till they have seen men

¹ Dugdale Mon. Angl. 6, 893.

² Dugdale Ibid.

within whom all human desires are actually dead. Gilbert first intended that his future convent was to be inhabited by monks ; he watched diligently the spiritual progress of the most promising among the men of his flock, but they were bowed down with the cares of this world. If he could keep them from open sin, he thought himself happy. Monks and nuns are not commodities to be found everywhere, and to be moulded for the nonce whenever they are wanted. Funds may be found, and buildings raised, and vestments manufactured, but it requires a special vocation from God to make man or woman renounce the world. And God at this time favoured Gilbert, for He had, in his goodness, determined that amidst the wickedness of the land, Sempringham should be the abode of holy virgins, whose purity would rise up before Him as a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. From the early habits which he had acquired in his school, Gilbert had ever loved children ; probably the remembrance of his own wayward childhood might have risen up before him, and inspired him with a desire of guiding them to keep their souls in their first unsullied brightness. He had thus acquired a natural influence over the children of the place which he had never lost, and when he came back from Lincoln, a priest of high reputation, none welcomed him more gladly than the maidens, who were but children when he left them. The world had not sullied them in the meanwhile, and he found that the good seed which he had sown in their hearts, had sprung up and borne fruit. And now that his plan of founding a community of monks had failed, he turned his thoughts towards them. The strict habits of religious seclusion in which he had been cherished, indisposed him greatly to attempt the establishment of a

nunnery. How could he, who had quitted the house in which he lodged on account of a dream, now undertake the government of a female community? It is true, that the intercourse between the sisters and their director was so reduced to rule, that however familiar, it was one of ceremony, like the ordinary customs of society; yet from his innate mistrust of self, he shrunk from the responsibility. It is probable, that some time elapsed before he could make up his mind to take the final step. At length he could not resist such evident marks of God's will; the quiet and calm resolution of the maidens to dedicate themselves for ever, showed that it was not the sentimentalism of a moment, but a real vocation from above. He went to the bishop of Lincoln to consult him on the subject; Alexander received him with the utmost cordiality, and entering warmly into his views, sent him back with all the necessary powers. The holy virgins were filled with joy at the news. None can estimate the greatness of the joy of a woman's heart when the love of Christ has fully seized upon it. Terrible as it is in its strength when fixed upon an earthly object, its intensity is increased tenfold when it rests upon the heavenly spouse. How wonderful has been the self-devotion of women from the first dawn of Christianity! None can think upon the wonders of the Incarnation, without thinking upon the mother of the Lord; and none can tell the wellspring of joy in that heart on which lay the Saviour of the world, for a favour was granted to her, which not the highest archangel can estimate. Ever since that time, some portions of the same joy must in a measure have inundated the heart of every virgin who has become the spouse of the Lord. What must have been the gush of joy in the heart of the Magdalene, when the ever-

blessed Lord said “ Mary,” and she turned and saw Him the everlasting source of all joy ? Such in its measure must have been the happiness of the seven virgins for whom Gilbert, with the bishop’s leave, now built a cloister adjoining the north wall of the church of Sempringham. Among them, the maiden whom Gilbert left in her father’s house, shut up her beauty for ever from the eyes of men. These seven virgins, chanting the praises of God in the dead of night around the altar of that little church, doubtless averted the anger of God from the land, with all its terrible pollutions. Such souls as these, who sit in quiet, with mortified bodies and chastened hearts ever fixed on heaven, have their own place in the christian scheme. If any one doubts it, let him think on the time when the Lord dwelt with His virgin mother in the house at Nazareth. No one will say that any part of our Lord’s sojourn on earth was useless ; and yet the world knows nothing of what was going on during these many years, except that in that poor cottage were obedience, and daily tasks and contemplation.

Before, however, going on to notice the important result to which these small beginnings of the order of Sempringham afterwards grew, we should cast our eyes across the channel to France, where a parallel movement had taken place rather earlier in the century. It is seldom that any movement occurs in any corner of the church, without being felt elsewhere ; nothing stops with itself in the body of Christ, it at once vibrates in some other part, sometimes close, and sometimes distant. Thus, about the year 1100, the blessed Robert of Arbrissel, had founded the abbey of Fontevraud, which agrees remarkably with what the priory of Sempringham, as we shall see, soon became. Like

Gilbert, Robert was a Parisian doctor, and like him had been summoned from a school to be the chief adviser of the bishop of his diocese, and the reformer of the clergy. On the death of this prelate, Silvester, bishop of Rennes, the rage of those who loved not his reforms, drove him away. Henceforth, his life presents a marked contrast to that of Gilbert ; he became a hermit, and sought the depths of a wild forest near Anjou. The savage wilderness did not however sour his heart ; he learned to converse with God, and when soon after his solitude was discovered, the sweetness which shone on his emaciated features, won all beholders ; and when he spoke, the fervour of his words gained the hearts of his hearers. Crowds streamed into the wilderness, to hear this new preacher of righteousness, and many left the world on the spot, to join him in his forest. Urban II., in his voyage to France, heard of Robert's fame, and sent for him ; he bade him preach before the council of Anjou, and the burning words of this hermit, thus fresh from the wilderness, and re-appearing among men, seemed to him so striking, that he called him the Sower of the word, and bade him henceforth go about as an Apostolic preacher. Robert obeyed the supreme pontiff, and went forth as a missionary. He went about the neighbouring dioceses, penetrating into the wildest villages, and preaching in streets and market-places. The effect was electric ; crowds of men and women followed him everywhere, and everywhere some souls were converted to Christ, from a life of wickedness. He walked barefoot, fasted continually, and often spent the whole night in prayer. Pope Urban was right ; this was just the apostle to despatch among a population where fearful licentiousness is said to have reigned. Women, especially, were touched by

his words, and it is expressly said, that while two of his companions assisted him in directing men, he had the exclusive direction of females. We know that our most blessed Lord, to whom the sight of sin must have been an inconceivable pain, suffered a foul adulteress to be near Him, and said to her, Go, and sin no more ; Mary Magdalene came still nearer to Him, and washed His feet with her tears. And Robert, following the steps of his Lord, was especially known as the converter of the most miserable outcasts of society. One day, at Rouen, he entered into a haunt of sin ; some unhappy wretches clustered about him, and he spoke to them of the mercy of Christ. They looked on, in stupid wonder, till one of them said, “ Who art thou that speakest thus ? For twenty years have I been in this house, and no one has spoken to me of God, or bade me not despair of mercy.” The poor creatures followed him out of the house, and afterwards led a life of penitence. But it was not only such miserable victims, that Robert, by God’s grace, saved from inveterate sin ; Bertrada de Montfort, who in the very cathedral of Tours on the eve of Whitsunday, seduced the heart of king Philip of France, and planned to fly from her lord, the Count of Anjou—the dangerous and scheming beauty, the witchery of whose talents had well nigh won her a crown—Bertrada, the scandal of the age, whom a Pope in council had excommunicated with her guilty paramour, was converted by Robert, and ended her days in the most rude penances, a nun of Fontevraud. It was there, in the midst of waste and uncultivated lands, covered with a wild thicket of brushwood, that Robert collected all those whom he had won from the world for Christ. His first monastery was but a collection of rude huts, separated into two divisions,

with two separate oratories, one for the brethren, the other for the sisters. Around that part in which the females dwelt, was a rough enclosure, which was nothing but a high hedge of thorns.¹ The nuns were all day long engaged in prayer and psalmody, while the monks laboured with their hands to support them, and struggled with the stubborn thorn and the tangled weeds, the growth of centuries around their habitation. Even in the life-time of Robert, Fontevraud had grown into a large monastery. Within its enclosure there were, in fact, three monasteries, one for holy virgins, dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, another for penitent women, called after St. Mary Magdalene, and a third was a lazar-house for the sick and the lepers. The reform spread throughout France, and in many parts of the country lands were given to Robert, where he founded new houses, where those un-

¹ Mr. Michelet, in his history of France, has repeated a story against the blessed Robert which even Bayle, though he indulged his foul wit on the subject, acknowledged to be false. The story is founded on two letters, one of Geoffrey of Vendôme, and another of Marbodius, bishop of Rennes. Mr. Michelet should have recollected that both Geoffrey and Marbodius profess to speak merely on hearsay, and Geoffrey is known to have changed his opinion, while it may be presumed that Marbodius did so too, from the fact, that his friend Hildebert, of Mans, was one of Robert's greatest patrons. Besides which, there is great reason to believe, that the letter ascribed to Marbodius, is really by the heretic, Roscelinus. It is a great pity that Mr. Michelet's inveterate habit of generalizing should lead him to prefer general, to particular truth. We do not charge him with dishonesty; on his theory, all history is a myth, and therefore, an opinion is just as valuable as a fact. When we have myths, we must make the best of them; but let not good personages of flesh and blood be treated like Romulus and Remus, if facts can be had.

happy women, whom the world had soiled, might find a refuge, where they might chastise by rude penances those bodies, the temples of the Holy Ghost, which they had stained. But the peculiarity of the order was, that the abbess every where held jurisdiction over the monks as well as the nuns; the men were there only to labour for the sisters, as St. John ministered to the Blessed Virgin. Robert's work did not die with him, and many a daughter of the blood royal of France became famous for her piety as abbess of Fontevraud. Here our own Henry Plantagenet and Richard Cœur de lion were buried: and here Eleanor too, Henry's queen, the beautiful and guilty daughter of William of Aquitaine, who transferred herself with Guienne and Poitou, and all her lands, to the English crown, she too, after her long and restless life, bequeathed her body to Fontevraud, that it might lie by the side of her husband and her son.

Any one will see at once the correspondence of the rise of this order on the continent with that of the nunnery of Sempringham, and a great conformity between the two will soon be apparent, as Sempringham developes; and yet there at once also appears a great contrast between them. The movement in the two countries appears to have been different. While in France the queens of the time are the scandal of the age; those of England and Scotland appear as reformers of the corrupt court of their husbands. The beautiful sorceress Bertrada, placed the king of France under the ban of the church of Rome, ever the great defender of the purity of marriage. Queen Eleanor, with her licentious train, had the merit of ruining the crusade, which St. Bernard preached; she too must needs go to the Holy Land, the daughter of the sunny

south, the land of the gay science and of heresy, she whose character had far more to do with the burning East than became a Christian queen. But on our side of the channel, were Matilda and St. Margaret, the reformers of Scotland, who banished from the kingdom many foul relics of Paganism which still infected it ; and in England, was Matilda, the wife of Henry I., the “good queen Maude,” whom the English hailed as the daughter of their ancient kings, and whose marriage tended to amalgamate the Norman and the Saxon races. Terrible as was the licentiousness in England, the nobles seem every where to have been the guilty parties. The monasteries were filled with virgins who had fled thither to preserve themselves from the dangers to which they were exposed. Matilda herself was taken out of a convent whither she had fled for that purpose, and was for that reason adjudged by St. Anselm not to have really taken the veil, and to be still competent to become Henry’s wife. The wicked nobles, whom the gentle majesty of her virtue kept in awe, nicknamed the king and queen, Godric and Godiva,¹ and laughed at Henry’s domestic life with his quiet Saxon queen. They still remembered the terrible license of the Red King’s wicked court. Corresponding to this difference between the two countries, was the contrast in the characters of Gilbert and of Robert. The wild energy of the hermit of Arbrissel was necessary to bear down the torrent of vice which opposed him ; could any one but a barefooted hermit speak to hearts spoiled by inveterate sin, and cleanse

¹ The wit seems to consist in the names being Saxon. Godiva comes, probably, from the old story of the Saxon queen who saved the people from taxation.

bosoms encrusted with a leprosy of guilt ? Gilbert had to do with untainted lilies fit for the garden of the Lord, he therefore had but to build his cloister adjoining to the quiet parish church of Sempringham, while the rough thorn-hedge, and the rougher discipline of Robert were necessary for Fontevraud. While Robert roams through France by the Apostolic mandate, preaching every where a crusade of penitence, Gilbert returns to the home of his childhood, and places his seven holy virgins in the church where he had first learned to worship God, and where, in all probability, he had been baptized. The church of Christ could find room enough for both, just as around the cross, there was room for the ever-virgin Mary, and St. Mary Magdalene. Holy virginity is no less a portion of Christianity than holy penitence, and the denial of the virtue of the one most certainly impairs the full belief in the other, for the Communion of Saints and the Forgiveness of sins lie close together in the creed. Nor is holy virginity the creation of an age of romance ; Gilbert, when he built the cloister at Sempringham, thought but little, as we shall soon see, of picturesque processions and flowing robes of white ; he only thought of the blessed Virgin, and of St. John, and of the white robed choir in heaven, who have followed the Virgin Lamb wherever He hath gone. Still less did he think about the usefulness of what he was doing ; as well might he have thought about the uses of chastity, for virginity is only chastity carried to a supernatural degree. Our blessed Lord has exalted human nature ; He hath made it the partaker of His own Divinity ; and we have virtues which were never possible before the coming of the Lord, because their formal cause was wanting, even the Holy Spirit.

Faith, Hope, and Charity have their foundation in the will and in the intellect, yet they are supernatural, because of the new powers which the adorable Incarnation has infused into our nature. It is not then to be wondered at, if their outward acts should sometimes take a form which seemed beyond the powers of a human body and a human soul, voluntary poverty, and holy obedience, and a chaste virginity. The cross of Christ has stretched itself over a vast field, of which heathen morality never dreamed, and they who deny the merit of virginity leave out a portion of Christian morals. They who can believe that no real righteousness is infused into the Saint, will, of course, see no beauty in the virgin soul, though she be all glorious within, with the intense fire of love, which the Holy Spirit has poured into her. The Cross has a philosophy of its own, which thwarts in unexpected directions the philosophy of the world. If Gilbert had ever heard of a certain Jovinian, he might have known that he was half a stoic, as well as wholly heretic ; because he could see no degrees in saintliness, neither could he discern that one vice was worse than another.¹ Again the deep philosopher who has set the bounds of the human intellect, which it cannot pass, he too has imagined a mysterious bound to the human will, and denies in his system the merit of holy virginity. So be it, but Christ has illumined the intellect with faith, and the will with charity, and there will ever be holy virgins in the Church in spite of transcendental philosophy. The seven nuns of Sempringham doubtless knew nothing of this philosophy ; but they knew of our blessed Lord's words, promising eternal life to those who should give

¹ St. Aug. de Hær. 82. see the connexion in St. Thomas Aq. contra gen. lib. iii. 189.

up father and mother, brethren and sisters, or wife, for his sake. The church, by regulating monastic vows, only pointed out one way of doing what Christ prescribed in the general, and furnished her children with the means of gaining this blessing. The bible says nothing about monks and nuns, but it says a great deal about prayer, and about taking up the cross. It is quite true that the cross has sanctified domestic affections, by raising marriage to a dignity which it never possessed before. And yet human affections are terrible things ; love is as strong and insatiable as death,¹ and how hard is it to love, as though we loved not, and to weep, as though we wept not, and to laugh, as though we laughed not. Happy are they to whom human affections are not all joy ; the mother has her cross as well as the nun, and it will be blessed to her. Happy they who have to tend the sick bed of a parent or a friend ; they need seek no further, they have their cross. Yet, happiest of all is she, who is marked out for ever from the world, whose slightest action assumes the character of adoration, because she is bound by a vow to her heavenly spouse, as an earthly bride is bound by the nuptial vow to her earthly lord. Vows should only be made under the protection of a strong religious system, but when they can be taken, they whom God by His providence calls, as He often does, to lead a single life, are far happier in the peaceful cloister than in the world. Even though some may have mistaken their vocation, and it had been better to marry, yet their vows are a protection, and every Christian can, by God's grace, in any case live a virgin life. Terrible cases have occurred, as we may by and bye see, of fallen nuns, but have fearful passions never broken out in the world ?

¹ Cant. viii.

CHAPTER V.

The spread of the Institute.

WHEN the cloister was finished, and Alexander of Lincoln had blessed it, and received the profession of the nuns, Gilbert had done a great work. He had gained an object on which to spend his patrimony, and had saved seven souls from the troubles and dangers of the world. But he was still far from having done his work ; the institute of his nuns was still rude and unformed, and it does not yet appear what rule they followed. It was about the year 1131, when first they quitted the world, and it was many years before the order was fully formed, and the steps by which it grew, are but scantily related by the chronicler of his life. First, it was a difficulty with him how his convent was to be supplied with necessaries. The sisters could not go out themselves, and butchers and bakers could not go to them. He first employed women who lived in the world, to transmit to them what they wanted for their daily food. This was however but a clumsy contrivance, and contrary to the first rule of monastic discipline, that a convent should be perfect in itself, and entirely independent of the world around. The echoes of worldly news could not fail to find their way into the nun's cell, and to call up images, which ought to be banished from her heart. Earthly cares must often call to earth the mind of her who rules her husband's house, though these too are meritorious, if done to the glory of God ; but the nun is continually to have her conversation in heaven, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. To effect this, the

world must be diligently kept out of her heart ; and the girls who went backwards and forwards, between market and the convent, were but too willing retailers of news. This was for a long time a difficulty with Gilbert ; at length, one day, William, the first abbot of Rievaux, passed through Sempringham, and paid its rector a visit. Gilbert had very probably never seen the white habit before, for the Cistercian reform had not long been introduced into England. From that moment he conceived a respect for the Cistercians, which never quitted him. He consulted William on his difficulties, and was advised by him to institute an order of lay-sisters who were to help the choir-nuns, and to perform menial offices for them ; in other words, they were to correspond to the lay-brethren of Citeaux. Gilbert took this advice, but he was too patient, and too much accustomed to wait on the providence of God, to introduce the change violently. The poor peasant girls whom he employed, were too much accustomed to hard labour and coarse fare to find even conventual discipline hard, but there were habits of humility, obedience, and strict purity to be acquired, which could not be learned in a day. He called them before him, and explained to them what he required of them, without abating a jot of the rigour of the discipline. The poor girls at first shrunk from the trial, but when he spoke to them from time to time of contempt of the world, of the giving up of their own will, and of the rewards of heaven, they first listened to him attentively, and then by degrees their hearts began to yield. It was far better for them to live in a convent, though they were under restraint, and they could not go out when they would, than to work all day long in the fields of a merciless taskmaster, and not be sure of

earning a livelihood after all. The sound of the convent-bell would sweeten their toil, and kind and holy words console their hearts ; besides, what was not least, they would be sure of being fed and clothed, and at last they determined to close with their pastor's proposal, and to give up the world. This however did not satisfy Gilbert, and he waited another year before he received their profession. He clothed them like the nuns, except that, instead of the ample cuculla and scapular of the nuns, the lay sisters wore a black cloak, lined with white lamb's wool ; the broad hood of their garment was made large enough to cover the shoulders, and to envelope the throat and bosom like the scapular of the nuns. The simple occupations of these poor peasant-girls shows more than any thing else, how monastic discipline is only Christianity in its perfection, hallowing and taking up into itself the meanest relations of life. The lay-sister was to take the hard work in brewing and baking, in spinning and washing ; if the nuns were otherwise engaged and did not come to help them, they were not to wait, but to begin without them. They mended clothes and prepared the washing-tubs, and some of them ever attended in the kitchen, to chop up the vegetables, and to hand utensils to the nun who was cook for the week. In these offices, intermingled with psalmody and other spiritual exercises at stated hours, they passed their lives, and for the temporal things which they ministered, the good nuns instructed them in the science of the cross, and Gilbert himself assiduously trained them up, that their earthly toil might bring fruit in heaven.

But though women can help each other to bake and brew, they cannot plough and dig ; and Gilbert soon

found that he must needs procure labourers, for the grounds attached to the nunnery. A convent of monks can support itself, but nuns, though they can do much alone, require men to labour for them. Again, in this difficulty, his friends of Citeaux helped him. He was in a greater strait than before ; lay-sisters were comparatively easy to manage, especially in what was a nunnery already, but the rude rustic was a much more unmanageable creature, and most unpromising to reduce to monastic rule. But while he was deliberating, some monks of the Cistercian order rode into his habitation, accompanied, as usual, by some lay-brethren. The whole equipage struck Gilbert, who had been used to the splendid train of Alexander of Lincoln. He at once seized the idea of the lay-brethren of the order, and determined thus to imitate the Cistercians, by turning every farm-house on his estates into something like a monastery, where, throughout all the appurtenances of cow-houses, stables, and barns, all should be subject to religious discipline. He had already done a vast service to Sempringham ; for how many poor women, whom poverty, and their defenceless condition, exposed to danger, had he safely housed in a religious house ? He now was to do the same for the men ; and in this case, his mercy was extended even to a lower and more degraded class. Some whom he took, were the churls from his own land, who were born on his demesne, and whom he had known and supported from their infancy ; but others were of the lowest class in the land, runaway serfs,¹ whom now he freed, by

¹ A dominis suis transfugos, quos nomen religionis mancipavit. These may have been churls, and not serfs, but they were most probably the latter, for he seems to contrast them with his own famuli.

taking them into religion ; others again, were wayside beggars. From these poor creatures he made up his lay-brethren ; he clothed them in the same rough garb as the Cistercian brethren, only that, besides the white tunic, they wore, under the outer cloak, of hodden grey, a short mantle, lined with skins, reaching to the middle of the thigh, which, as it does not occur in the rule of Citeaux, was probaby an English garment, better adapted to our inclement sky ; over the head was drawn the Cistercian hood, covering the shoulders and the chest. These poor men were not taught to read, but they were taught humility, obedience, and the strictest purity, and were treated with a tenderness to which they had been utter strangers in the world. Instead of being ground down to the earth by a secular lord, they were under the gentle rule of the Church, and their temporal and eternal welfare was cared for. They had a chapter of their own, like monks, and services proportioned to their condition in life, and their spiritual director guided them in the narrow way which leads to everlasting life. Especially were they warned to beware of the Saxon vice of intoxication ; and above all, were they forbidden to set up the place “ which, in Teutonic tongue, is called the tap.”¹

It is impossible to calculate how far the influence of such a community might spread among the peasantry throughout England, when there was established among them, and before their eyes, such an institute, where, for the love of God, brethren, who had been rude peasants like themselves, were serving religious women whom they had never seen, except in church, with their veils over their faces, though they had heard their voices mingling in the chant. On the

¹ Vid. Gilbertine rule ap. Dugdale, vol. vi. p. 2. p. 65.

accession of the lay-brethren to his family, Gilbert's nunnery might be said to be now complete ; all were hard at work in the community ; in the granges around it, the lay-brethren were distributed, each at work at his own occupation ; in one corner, was the blacksmith at his forge, in his black rochet, or scanty coat without sleeves ;¹ and here was the carter,² with his horses shorn of the flowing honours of the mane and tail, that they might accord with monastic simplicity ; in another place, was the brother who had the charge of the whole grange, with the keys at his girdle, diligently searching for eggs, and storing up the honey, that all may be sent to the refectory of the nunnery.³ And this peaceful family went on in the stormy times when Stephen was battling for the crown, when, in the self-same county, Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, was shorn of his three castles. Alarms of war were sounding about them ; for it was near Lincoln that Stephen fought the battle where he was taken prisoner ; and the great baron Gilbert of Ghent, of whom was held the manor of Sempringham, shared the king's captivity.⁴ Abbeys and monasteries were burning about them, and the church, all over England, was in trouble ; the see of York was vacant ; Durham was in the hands of Comyn, and the archbishop of Canterbury was in little favour with the king ; and when he threatened to cross over the Alps, and appeal to the Pope, Stephen declared that he might find it no such easy matter to return. And yet, in the midst of all this trouble, the convent of Sempringham was holding its even course ; in the darkest times there are ever some little nooks in the Church, where there is peace.

¹ Reg. Gilb. De frat. 1.² Ibid 19.³ Ibid 17.⁴ John of Hexham, in ann. 1142.

Even Alexander, of Lincoln, found comfort in thinking on the parish church of Sempringham, and all that was going on about it. The death of his uncle, Roger, bishop of Salisbury, apparently, by chagrin at the fall of his power, seems to have deeply affected him, and he determined to give to the nuns of Sempringham an island, called Haverholm, formed by some marshy ground, and the waters of a little river near Sleaford, the site of one of his unfortunate castles.¹ He had before offered the ground to a colony of Cistercians, from Fountains, but even they, apparently, found it too wet, and removed to Louth Park. The bishop gave it to the nuns, "for the soul of King Henry, and my uncle Roger, some time bishop of Salisbury."² The charter which contains Alexander's gift, makes it plain that by this time the nuns had adopted a modified Cistercian rule ; for it says of them, that they follow, "a strict life, a holy life ; the life of the monks of Cistercian order, as far as the weakness of their sex allows." This probably means that they adopted the unmitigated rule of St. Benedict. Their rules were afterwards drawn out definitely, and when this is noticed, it will appear more clearly what this meant. So much

¹ Roger died in 1139, Hoveden, Script. post Bed. p. 277, and the foundation of Haverholm must have been about this time.

² In the year 1131, where we have placed the foundation of the nunnery, there were very few Cistercian abbeys in France ; indeed, the abbey of Tard, in the diocese of Langres, is the only one of which the foundation is certainly previous to that time. Juilly, it appears certain, was a Benedictine dependency on Molesme. It is, therefore, very unlikely that St. Gilbert should have begun so early to imitate the Cistercians. The idea must have struck him from his increasing intercourse with Cistercians.

of the Cistercian rule consisted in manual labours, quite inapplicable to females, that the conformity of the life of Gilbert's nuns to the brethren of Citeaux, must have been the austerity of their mode of life, and the use of meditation. The sisters of Sempringham, though they washed and spun, and brewed, yet, having been Gilbert's scholars, were learned maidens, in their way, for when their numbers increased, it was found necessary to prohibit the speaking Latin amongst each other, which would, in fact, have divided the convent into the learned and unlearned sisters. They had, therefore, more facilities for spiritual reading, and for meditation, than were common ; but for all that, it was a bold thing to apply the rule of St. Benedict to delicate females, in all the strictness in which St. Scholastica had learned it from the lips of her brother. Nunneries had degenerated both in England and France ; in England, they had not long ago been censured for their splendid robes and secular apparel ;¹ and a very few years later, the council of Rheims complained of the nuns, who lived irregularly, each on her own property, without even keeping within the precincts of the cloister.² In this respect, the good nuns, though they little suspected it, were reformers, when they were transported to their little island of St. Mary, of Haverholm, where they had nothing to look upon but their own green meadows and cultivated land, and beyond, the little river, running between its low banks, and the sluggish waters of the marsh, shutting them out from the world.

¹ Council of London, 1139. ² Geroch. ap. Baluz. vol. i. 204.

CHAPTER VI.

Gilbert in France.

It has taken but a short chapter to tell how, from 1131 to 1139, the order, or rather the convent, of Sempringham was increasing, and that it had sent out a colony of nuns to Haverholm ; and it takes but a few words to say, that from the foundation of Haverholm, to 1148, the fame of the sanctity of the nuns spread far and wide, and that their numbers still further increased, so that many noblemen gave lands to Gilbert, wishing to have a convent built near their own homes.¹ Many things may have occurred in these years of which we know nothing ; at all events, Gilbert was growing old all the while ; near twenty years are added to his life in that time. Many things must have happened to him and to his institute, but we need not regret the loss of them. The less that monks and nuns are heard of the better. They are the under-current in church history ; they need not appear on the surface, though their action in the deep waters purifies the

¹ It does not appear what convents were founded at this time. Bullington is founded for nuns and clerks, and, therefore, was not built till after Gilbert's return from France. Catteley, which is placed by Dugdale in Stephen's time, as appears from the chart of foundation, was not founded till Henry II's. reign. Ormesby and Sixhill, the dates of which are unknown, may have been founded then, but the fact most probably is, that the lands were given, but the monasteries not founded, till after Gilbert had been to Clairvaux.

whole. They are, so to speak, the moving element in the church, whose doctrine and hierarchy is one, and immoveable ; thus, they vary themselves, as the wants of the church vary. They are the reformers of the church, that is, of her children, when faith waxes cold ; the pliant and elastic element, which takes a different shape, according to the Proteus-form of sin, which it opposes. In the first fervour of their conversion, they work some great work ; they may afterwards degenerate, but the work is done, and by the time that they require reform, so, too, may the church. But all their work is done in secret, by contemplation and prayer and penance ; and whenever they make their appearance on the surface of society, they portend a storm. It was a schism in the Church which called forth St. Bernard from his monastery, and now that Gilbert goes to visit the great abbot of Clairvaux, the stormy part of his life is to begin. But what takes him so far from his home when, for so many years, he had remained in quiet at Sempringham ? He must have been aroused indeed, to undertake it. And so he was ; what he had simply begun, for the sake of seven maidens, whose hearts God had filled with heavenly love, had now sprung up into an institute, which he could no longer manage alone. The very soul of the institute was spiritual guidance, and the sisters were now so numerous, that he could not bear the burden by himself. His friends, the Cistercians, had stood him in good stead, and he determined to apply to them, and to beg of them to take the institution into their hands. Events were taking place at Citeaux which made the year 1148 a favourable one for his request ; and we will precede him, to take a glimpse of the state of things on the Continent.

And first, where has St. Bernard been all this while? he has had other work to do, since by God's grace, he restored unity to the church and placed Innocent II. on the papal throne. Many events had taken place at Rome since that time; the turbulent nobles seem then to have been broken, and a republican element now appears to stir up that ever restless race. The cities of northern Italy were aroused, and the dark storm from the Apennines rolled its way on to Rome; and this time it was guided by a man well fitted by his talents and his boldness to be the author of mischief. Arnold of Brescia rapidly saw the theory which would symbolize the new interests which thus stepped into the conflict, and he had a fiery enthusiasm and eloquence which fitted him to be its herald. He saw that the power of the bishops was irksome to the citizens. All will recollect the part which Milan took against its archbishop, Landulfus, in the middle of the eleventh century, and how often the same scenes were renewed in that turbulent city. Arnold took up this feeling, and attacked the prelates, many of whom, as was the case so often in the empire, were secular princes as well as bishops. Not that, he said, the churches of these bishops are not the house of God, but the prelates themselves are not bishops, and the people should not obey them.¹ He inveighed in strong terms against the secularity of the clergy, which was but too palpable, and thus he was looked upon as a reformer. He asserted that the spiritual and secular power are so totally distinct, that they cannot possibly by any means be joined. This doctrine is very like the great truth, that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, that is,

¹ Geroch ap. Gretser. vol. 12. Otto Frising. de Gest. Fred. ii. 21.

that the church of Christ has a power of her own, totally independent of, and above any earthly jurisdiction ; and it has deceived many since Arnold's time. He appealed to the ancient feelings of the Italian republics, and made them fiercer by giving them a seemingly religious direction. His doctrines spread southward ; and though he himself was obliged to fly to France, yet they raised a sedition in Rome, and Innocent's last days were embittered by the news that the Romans had re-established the senate and revolted from his authority. In the time of Celestine, his successor, they deposed the prefect of the city, an officer virtually appointed by the Pope, though nominally also by the emperor : and established an officer whom they called a patrician, probably from some notion which they had of the connexion of the title with the time of the Eastern empire. A more terrible event soon followed ; Lucius, the successor of Celestine, died from a wound received in attempting to quell an insurrection, and thus the blood of a successor of St. Peter, lay at the door of this infatuated and degraded people. It was at this time, that the mock senate of Rome determined to claim the right of assenting to the nomination of the supreme pontiff, in other words, as the representative of the people, it wished to restore the election to what it was before Innocent II's. time.¹ The cardinals were aware of this, and suddenly and hastily they met to elect the successor of St. Peter. The choice which they made astonished Christendom, when it was announced that they had elected Bernard, abbot of Saint Anastasius, a Cistercian convent near Rome, a man of blameless life and gentle manners, but apparently of little talents,

¹ Vid. Life of St. Stephen, p. 174.

and above all, not a member of the college of cardinals. They seem, in their alarm at the dreadful event which had just happened, to have determined on electing one not of their own body, for it was the rule of an ecclesiastical aristocracy that the Romans hated, and they pitched in their fright on the first eligible person of whom they could think. The finger of God was not the less observable in the whole transaction, for Eugenius III. had been a monk of Clairvaux, and St. Bernard's influence began at once to be felt in the church. The pontificate of Eugenius was an epoch in the church; he came just before the age of rescripts, and appeals, and canonists;¹ and the broad principles laid down by St. Bernard, of course influenced the practice of the papal courts, and, therefore, tended to modify the doctrine concerning appeals as laid down by Alexander III. Again, secular prelates soon began to feel a new influence in the court of Rome, proof against riches and magnificence.² The cardinals themselves were not slow in complaining of Gallican influence, and had it not been for St. Bernard's meekness, a schism might have separated France from Italy.³ His election, however, was unanimous; out of his abbey they fetched this lowly and shamefaced monk, who had washed the dishes at Clairvaux; they took the spade and the reap-

¹ On the law of rescripts, see appendix to the third Lateran council ap. Mansi, p. xxxi. As to appeals, *ibid.* p. x. and compare. St. Bern. de Cons. lib. iii. c. 2. The canon law is said to have been compiled by Gratian, about A. D. 1150.

² John of Salisbury bears witness to the purity of Eugenius's administration.—Vid. Ciacconi. Vit. Eug. III.

³ St. Bernard's letter to the cardinals on Eugenius's election, shows a doubt how far they would support him. For the discontent of the cardinals, v. Otto Frisin. de Gest. Frid. i, 57.

ing-hook out of his hand, and put the scarlet mantle over his white Cistercian habit, and in solemn procession enthroned him in the Lateran. All at once, a change came over this simple monk ; an unflinching firmness appeared in the sweet mannered brother, who, not long before, had found his abbey of St. Anastasius too much for his sick soul, and had longed for the forest and the cavern ; he even showed a talent for business, which none had seen before his mysterious elevation. This too, was totally apart from the influence of the abbot of Clairvaux. St. Bernard's soul sunk within him at the news. "God forgive you, what have ye done," he writes to the cardinals. "Had ye no wise and practical men among you that ye have elevated a man in a pauper's garb ? It is either an absurdity or a miracle." He knew well the poor brother of Clairvaux, and thought him totally unfit to sit in St. Peter's chair. He, therefore, did not even write to him till urged to do so by his friends. Eugenius had need of all the qualities which now appeared in him ; Arnold of Brescia was in Rome, now clad in monkish garb and fresh from the lessons of Abelard ; seditions were raised and cardinals' palaces burnt, not now by the nobles, for the Frangipani¹ were now on the Pope's side, but by the populace. The fiery monk had dazzled them with visions of old Rome, and they had dreams of the senate, the equestrian order, and the Capitol. Here was the old secular empire springing up in a grotesque form ; a wild mixture of the Gracchi, Julius Cæsar, and Constantine.² Added to this, the germs of those miserable revolutions of

¹ Otto Frisin. de Gest. Frid. i. 28.

² Vid. Letter of the Roman people to Conrad.—Otto Frisin. Ibid.

which the emperor Frederic afterwards took advantage, were desolating the north of Italy ; and an impatience of ecclesiastical rule had sprung up, which now broke out in the open maltreatment of bishops and archbishops in the north, just as the cardinals had suffered at Rome.¹ Eugenius pacified the north of Italy, but Rome was as yet beyond his power ; he was ultimately obliged to cross the Alps.

It was during this journey that Gilbert saw his holiness, and was brought in contact with a series of events which would look like romance, if history did not assure us of their truth. They are the outbursts of the young life of a christian people, before scepticism had touched the purity of their faith ; while at the same time, there come across us outbursts of wickedness at times almost ludicrous in its waywardness, and at other times terrible from its marring the good which God had prepared for Christendom. But most wonderful of all are they from the predominant influence of St. Bernard, whom God had raised up to guide his church amidst the dangers which surrounded her. It is refreshing to see a man, in a poor habit, riding at the side of kings and emperors, and guiding all things, simply because he is Christ's servant. At the time that Eugenius entered France, Louis was about to set out on the crusade which had been undertaken on the alarming news of the taking of Edessa. A great parliament² had been held at Etampes to elect the regent during the king's absence ; St. Bernard was in the midst of the circle of bishops and barons, and when their deliberations were over, he came forward at the head of them, and said to the king, Behold, here are

. ¹ Pet. Ven. Ep. iv. 37.

² Magnum colloquium.

thy two swords. The one was the great Suger, the other the count of Nevers. Both refused the office ; the count fled away and took the vows in a Carthusian monastery, but Suger was persuaded by St. Bernard to accept the charge. This event alone tended more than any other to consolidate the French monarchy, and prepare the way for Philip Augustus and St. Louis. This was on Septuagesima Sunday ; a little before Easter, Louis went to meet Eugenius at Dijon. When the royal procession approached, those around Eugenius cried out, The king, the king ; but Eugenius sat unmoved, and when Louis came near with his train of nobles, he leaped off his horse and kissed the pope's foot with tears of joy, thus doing homage to Christ in the person of his earthly representative. Then Eugenius raised him up and embraced him. Strange times were these, when religion was thus honoured, and St. Mary's prophecy had come to pass, and the strong things of the world had fallen down before the weak. It was this that passed through the mind of Eugenius when he embraced Louis, and remembered his own lowly origin, and said, that God indeed had raised the simple out of the mire, reminding the king also, that he, a monk of Clairvaux, had worked in the kitchen with Henry of France, Louis's brother. And yet, the times had their strange caprices too, for not long after, when the pope went to celebrate in solemn procession at St. Genevieve, the attendants of the canons quarrelled with those of the pope, and they fought with their fists with such fury, that even king Louis, in attempting to separate the combatants, suffered in the fray.¹ On Easter

¹ Baronius in ann. 1147.

day, in the abbey of St. Denis, in the presence of Eugenius, Louis received the Oriflamme from the altar ; all the great barons of the realm were about him, and all the chivalry of France, with the knight-templars in their white cloaks, and all wore the cross to show that they were on their way to rescue the Holy Sepulchre. This was a day of joy, but alas ! how few of that brilliant array ever saw again the shores of France. By the side of Louis sat his lovely and fascinating queen, with all her damsels around her ; it had been well if she had been left behind, for God, on account of the sins of the host, would not allow them to rescue the Holy City. This, however, none could foresee on that happy Easter day.

After their departure, St. Bernard had other work to do ; and let not the reader be impatient to meet Gilbert at Citeaux. The delay will enable him the better to understand the course of events. That sect which afterwards became the Albigenses, and in that form threatened to undermine the whole church, had attracted the vigilant eye of Eugenius. As it first appears to us, it takes the simple shape of an inveterate hatred of all mystery, with an especial dislike of churchmen, and church authority. Its apostle was a runaway monk called Henry, a sort of impure and inferior Arnold of Brescia. Peter¹ the venerable, considered the heresy to have come from among the wild and ignorant inhabitants of the Alpine valleys ; but he soon found to his wonder that it had spread into the fair plains of Provence. There, in this luxurious and half Moorish country, it met another element, a subtle Manicheism, and this compound of vice, disobedience, and error, was the Albigen-

¹ Pet. Ven. contr. Petrob. bibl. Clun. p. 1122.

sian heresy.¹ The licentious soldiery² cared but little for theological disputes, but understood too well the value of license not to profess themselves Henricians ; and the infatuated people burned crucifixes, profaned the churches, flogged priests, and imprisoned monks, or compelled them to marry. The only way in which this terrible and spreading evil could be met, was by sending missionaries to preach in this centre itself of heresy. St. Bernard himself was sent with Alberic, cardinal bishop of Ostia. The cardinal preceded him, and arrived at Albi, the stronghold of the heretics, two days before him ; but the people had but little reverence for cardinals and legates of the Holy See ; a short distance from the city, Alberic was met by a quaint procession of men mounted on asses, and women playing on cymbals ; and when the bells of the church rung for mass, not thirty of the faithful attended. When St. Bernard arrived, the city poured out of the gates to meet him ; the countenance and figure of the saint struck them at once, and the fickle people received him with shouts of joy. But St. Bernard looked upon them sternly, and they saw no more of him that day. The morrow was the feast of St. Peter, and the great church was crowded with people, so that some of them were compelled to stand outside the porch. St. Bernard looked around on the upturned visages beneath, and said, I had come to sow good seed, but I find the ground already sown with

¹ St. Bernard In Cant. Serm. 66, connects a similar set of heretics with the Manichees from the similarity of their doctrines, though ignorant of their historical origin. Evervinus, in his letter to the saint, distinguishes two sets of heretics, one much more doctrinal than the other.—Vid. St. Bern. Ed. Ben. vol. i. 1489.

² Ep. Goffr. ap. S. Bernardi op. ed. Ben. vol. ii. p. 1195.

corrupt seed. But now will I detail to you each kind of seed, see ye which ye will have. He then drew out the catholic faith side by side with that of Henry. There was no need of premise and conclusion ; arguments would have been thrown away on the people of Albi. The juxta-position was enough ; a thrill ran through the whole assembly, and when St. Bernard asked them which seed they would choose, the hearts of the people were already won back to the church. Do penance then, said the holy abbot, as many of you as are polluted, and return to the unity of the church of Christ : and he bade them hold up their hands in token of catholic unity ; and all with joy raised up their right hands to heaven. And this, says the faithful monk, who was an eye-witness of this scene, in his letter written to Clairvaux, is to be preferred to all his other miracles. He went every where from place to place preaching the word of God, and before he had left the country, heresy had every where fled before his face. He afterwards addressed them letters full of tenderness, and the remembrance of his visit for some time kept heresy under. If this corrupt people had continued to remember the good abbot who had ventured among them in their wildest mood, how much blood and misery would have been spared ; but at all events, St. Bernard stopped for a time this miserable evil, which afterwards threatened the very existence of Christendom. Alas ! a few favourable circumstances, a corrupt court and a corrupt clergy, and the old and mysterious Manicheism of the country, produced an open heresy in the south of France, but there were all over Europe, men who hated the church because she came across their plans or their vices, and who took advantage of the cowardice or worldliness of churchmen to oppress her ; and so it

ever will be till the end of time. But God raises up His saints to the help of His bride, and it is pleasing amidst the melancholy picture, to follow the steps of such a man as St. Bernard.

We are now fast approaching Citeaux, where we are again to meet Gilbert, and where he is to meet St. Bernard and Pope Eugenius. St. Bernard probably left the south of France in the autumn of 1147 ; soon after which Eugenius determined to visit again the scenes in which he had passed the happiest days of life. The general chapter of Citeaux took place as usual on the 14th of September. Hither also came Gilbert, after so many years, in which he hardly crossed the bounds of the parish of Sempringham ; he now found himself in the midst of the most august assembly in Christendom, in the company of the first men of the day.¹ More than three hundred abbots of the Cistercian order were sitting around, with the head of Christendom in the midst. St. Stephen had long since been gathered to his rest, and his successor, Rainaldus, presided over the chapter. St. Bernard was there now in the decline of life, with an enfeebled body and an untired soul, the centre of the affairs not only of the order, but of the

¹ There seems every reason to suppose that this chapter at Citeaux was in 1147. It appears from a document quoted in Pagi's notes to Baronius, Tom. xix. p. 4, that he was there on the 18th of that month ; and he could not have been there again next year, as Pagi and Muratori suppose, because he had left France in June, and the chapter was always in September. Again, Goffridus, in his life of St. Bernard, seems to imply, that it was in the same year that he entered France, cum introiset Gallias—eodem anno apud Cistercium affuit. Vit. S. Bern. iv. 7. His visit to Clairvaux however took place next year, for it is expressly stated to have been after the council of Rheims. Ibid. ii. 8.

whole of the Christian world. He indeed was unconscious, except when at times it came across him that men did think a great deal of him, and it puzzled him much, "for how could so many great men be wrong?" and yet it was true that he was an unprofitable servant.¹ Thus he spoke to his friends in private, and there he was with all eyes upon him, yet too much intent on God to know it. Gilbert was not the only stranger who came with his petition; for another comes with a similar request. He is a man of quaint figure and uncomely features: his stature is short, and his plain face is furrowed every where with deep wrinkles.² When he smiles, he twists his body and raises his shoulders up to his head in a strange way; but his eyes are piercing, and seem to look through those who speak with him; and altogether his face was not unpleasing, for, though emaciated and hard-featured from exposure to the air, the countenance had a strange mixture of sweetness and sternness. This was Stephen, who had lately established a double monastery at Obazina, in the diocese of Limoges, not far from Tullés. It was a wild glen, through which ran a small stream, and all around it was a thick wood, and high rocks, through which flowed a larger stream, called Courreze; the monastery itself was built on a jutting rock, round the base of which rolled the clear waters of the rapid river. It was a rough place, and yet the abbot externally was as rough a man. His discipline was stern; if one of the novices but dropped his book, he received a box on the ear, which sounded through the church. One Saturday evening, the monks who had

¹ Vit. St. Bern. v. 12.

² Baluz. Misc. vol. i. p. 169.

had charge of the bakehouse, after compline, when all were in bed, felt so happy that their week was over, that they became unusually merry. They were tilting at each other with sticks, and amusing themselves, when all of a sudden they espied the dark figure of the abbot, who had come up unawares, and had been watching their proceedings. The poor monks immediately took to flight, knowing well what a severe punishment would ensue, and next day they took care to accuse themselves of this fault before another rose to be beforehand with them, and Stephen seeing their fright by their pale faces and haggard countenances, saw that they had already suffered enough, and excused them. And yet Stephen had a gentle heart ; he wept with those whom he saw were frightened at his severe discipline, and would not allow them to pine away. The nobles of the country were cruel and tyrannical, men who oppressed the poor, and before these steel-clad ruffians would Stephen stand in his coarse black habit, in behalf of the wretched. Once a whole country side was desolated by a baron, because another noble, to whom the ground belonged, had made away with a favourite hawk ; Stephen goes to the baron, and promises to find the hawk if he will but go away in peace. Then Stephen set out in the depth of winter, on foot, to the nobleman's castle, and when he got there, was refused admittance, as might have been expected ; then he trudged back in the snow, discouraged, but not in despair. He soon set out again on the same quest, and by God's help, he was at this time successful, and he came back with the beautiful hawk upon his wrist, and restored it to its owner. At another time when a fearful insurrection of the peasantry against their lords left the fields uncultivated, and a famine ensued, he fed

thousands at the gates of the abbey. He now came to put his monastery under the Cistercian rule ; his fame had come before him, and Pope Eugenius himself presented him to the lord Abbot of Citeaux, and Rainaldus in turn presented him to the chapter, with an eulogium, which was very complimentary to his piety, but by no means so to his personal appearance. He took him by the hand, and said, See my lords and brethren, here is an abbot, little in body, short in stature, contemptible in garb, ugly in face ; but, whatever there is of him, be assured is full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith. He then named his request, and the Pope's recommendation to the abbots ; at first they murmured, for it was against the rule of the order to receive a community of women. But when Rainaldus promised that this should be remedied, they could not refuse a request, backed by the Pope's authority, and the monastery of Obazina was received into the filiation of Citeaux. The Cistercians were right in accepting the rule of this monastery, for they improved it by their government. It partook of the rude and almost humorous simplicity of Stephen himself. The poor nuns in their simplicity, when they looked on their glen and the rocky mountains which bounded it, believed that all the world with its cities and magnificent towns lay just outside the woody mountain tops. Boys under five years old were brought up in the convent of the nuns, and were then removed into that of the monks. As one little boy was crossing, under the guidance of a monk, the steep path between the two monasteries, the brother asked him how he liked the women with whom he had been living. Women ! said the child ; I have never seen any women. Those with whom I have been living were called sisters.

And this child was a type of the rude simplicity and unreasoning purity of the monasteries now delivered into the hands of Citeaux.

So far Gilbert's mission seemed to prosper ; a double monastery had been received into the order of Citeaux. He had an audience of Pope Eugenius, and laid his case before him. The Pope was much interested in him ; he wanted news from England, for the church was in a miserable state in a country torn with civil war, in which churches and abbeys were turned into fortresses, and the clergy were mercilessly laid under contributions. What was worse the bishops themselves had but too often turned soldiers, and with their armed bands harried the poor peasants, and plundered the fruit of their lands. The bishop of Hereford alone is praised as being a courageous defender of the church's rites. Besides all this, the conduct of Stephen gave Eugenius much cause for alarm. He and his uncle, Henry of Winchester, were in no good odour at Rome, since the new order of things under the rule of Eugenius.¹ The Pope had therefore deprived Henry of the legatine office, and had transferred it to Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury. St. Bernard was evidently aiming at purifying the English church of secular prelates. But a short time before, at Paris, he had procured the deposition from the see of York of Stephen's nephew and nominee, the same to whom God afterwards gave grace to become St. William. All this made the presence of Gilbert most interesting to Eugenius, and he soon learned to love his simplicity and quiet energy. When, however, Gilbert talked to him about giving up the conduct of his order to the Cis-

¹ John of Hexham, in ann. 1147.

tercians, he found him and the chapter decidedly averse to it. The order would not undertake the government of a female convent. In the case of Obazina, it was possible to separate them, but at Sempringham, the very object of the institute, was the spiritual direction of nunneries, and the one could not exist without the other. The chapter therefore altogether declined Gilbert's offer. This was a sad disappointment to him, for the anxious charge was still upon his shoulders, and he knew not how to bear it. The only thing to be done was to associate other priests with him in the government of the nunnery. He did not yet go back to Sempringham ; the events of this year of his life are obscurely told, but it appears incidentally that he remained in France the greater part of the year 1148.¹ His charge was now becoming more anxious than ever, and he probably remained behind to learn the rule of the canons of St. Augustine, for he now determined to join to each convent of his order a certain number of canons, who were to be the spiritual guides of the nuns.² At this time in Burgundy, in the same province as Citeaux, the canons of St. Maurice had been reformed ; again, instead of the turbulent secular canons of St. Genevieve, those of St. Victor were gradually substituted ; and the year before, in his journey to Toulouse, St. Bernard had, by his burning words, converted the unruly clerks of the cathedral of Bordeaux, who for seven years had undergone the sentence of excommunication rather

¹ He was at the general chapter of Citeaux, in September, 1147, and he was also at Clairvaux, when St. Malachi arrived four or five days before St. Luke's day, 1148. He may indeed have gone back to England, and made another journey to France, but his biographer only mentions one journey.

² Geroch ap. Baluz Misc. ii. 207.

than become canons regular.¹ And much need had the cathedrals of reform, for in many places the old discipline had gone out, and the canons were living as they pleased, in houses of their own, having entirely given up the old monastic principle; and they boldly maintained that the rule of Aix-la-Chapelle had tacitly allowed this disorder.² But a general feeling was growing up against this practice, and Eugenius therefore warmly approved of Gilbert's plan. These were happy days for Gilbert, which he spent with St. Bernard, who loved him well. Eugenius too loved him, and said, that if he had but known him before, he would have nominated him to the see of York. This was a fortunate escape for Gilbert, for often must Henry Murdach have regretted the cloister of Fountains, after he had been consecrated by the hands of the Pope himself at Treves. His pallium hung heavy about his neck, when he found himself opposed to Stephen and his son Eustace, petulant, so thought cardinal Gregory,³ as the goat, without the nobleness of the lion. Gilbert found that he had weight enough to bear in the rule of his own order, for which he was now preparing, and which Pope Eugenius formally conferred upon him before he left France. Probably Gilbert was at Clairvaux, when Eugenius, on his way back to turbulent Italy, came to take a last look at that place where he had first known peace, and had spent so many happy days. He must needs see St. Bernard and Clairvaux, before he again crossed the Alps, never to see them more. As he wound along with his suite,

¹ Goff. Epist. vit. St. Bern. lib. vi. ad fin.

² Geroch. p. 223. This must be what the author means by the rule of King Louis.

³ St. Thomas, Ep. 4. 14.

the narrowing valley, where he had so often borne the heat and cold as a common labourer, the great bell of the abbey rung, and all the brethren assembled in the choir ; then the whole convent came out to meet him, St. Bernard first, with his pastoral staff, and the novices last, two and two. Then when he came to the abbey gates, all knelt before him, and when they rose, St. Bernard gave him holy water, and kissed his hand, and then with chanting, all passed into the abbey. Eugenius wept abundantly, and when he spoke to the monks, telling them that he was their fellow and brother, his words were broken by sobs. He wore the white cuculla day and night, as the rule prescribed, and under the rich purple hangings and embroidered coverlet of his bed, was the common straw pallet of the order. His suite was too large to allow him to remain long at Clairvaux, and with a sad heart he set out again to cross the Alps.

Before he left Clairvaux, Gilbert saw another illustrious personage. This was St. Malachi ; he came all the way from the north of Ireland, hoping to see Eugenius at Clairvaux, but when he arrived, five days before the feast of St. Luke, he found that the pope had gone away, and was even then not far from Rome. King Stephen had detained him, with his usual obstinacy ; he was afraid of Rome, and would not suffer any bishop to cross the sea to the council of Rheims. The archbishop of Canterbury alone contrived to cross the channel in a crazy vessel, but when he returned from France, Stephen drove him into exile, and could only be brought to reason by laying an interdict on his lands. It was a part of this quarrel which prevented St. Malachi from reaching Clairvaux in time to see the pope, then on the point of leaving France. His

had been a long and a weary life, for he had been the reformer of the Irish church. With a handful of brethren he had renewed the old monastery of Benchor, and had built up a church of wood, which St. Bernard calls "a work of the Scots, and handsome enough." He had had hard work among wild Irish chieftains and their clans; once he narrowly escaped martyrdom; their savage eyes glared at him for a moment, but his presence disarmed them, and he, who was to give the signal, durst not do it. His was the most unruly diocese in Christendom; it had been for nine generations an appanage of a chieftain's family; eight had successively borne the title and swayed the power of the metropolitan see, being all the while no more than laymen. The last archbishop was a married man, but he was really consecrated, and on his death-bed, by his wife, he sent his crosier to St. Malachi. He left him an heritage of toil; on foot, with a few clerks, he braved the bitter cold, the deep bogs, and the rough roads of his country; and what was far worse, he battled with his half-heathen countrymen. He had to put down savage customs, unbridled concubinage, and lawless men chafing sorely at an ecclesiastical yoke. The first stone church which the saint built, raised an outburst of barbarian fury; they said that their bishop had turned Frenchman, and had ceased to be a true-hearted Scot, with his new-fangled architecture.¹ At length he had seen the fruits of his toilsome life; church and state had been reformed by him; the civil law had taken the place of savage customs; churches were rebuilt, and priests ordained; confirmation was administered, and matrimony enforced. Innocent II. had

¹ Gallus non Scotus. St. Bern. Vit. St. Malachiæ. St. Bernard calls him only Bishop, because he had not received the pallium.

delayed giving him the pall of an archbishop on account of some informality ; but to make amends, he took his mitre off his own head and put it upon the head of St. Malachi. He had now come to Clairvaux to receive the pall from the hands of Eugenius. Some of his clergy had accompanied him down to the sea-shore, and made him promise to come back to Ireland, and had watched him with straining eyes embark on board his vessel. He did fulfil his promise, for contrary winds drove him back to Ireland, but they never saw his face again. He had always wished to die at Clairvaux, in the arms of his friend St. Bernard, and now he was to have his wish, for the days in which Gilbert was with him were the last that he spent upon earth. St. Bernard vividly describes the joy of this intercourse. “ How joyous a holiday dawned upon us when he came into Clairvaux. With how quick and bounding a step, did I, though infirm and trembling, run to meet him ! With what joy did I rush to kiss him ! With what joyful arms did I embrace this grace sent me from heaven ! And then what joyful days did I pass with him, and yet how few ! ” It was in these last days that Gilbert saw him, and he was admitted to a familiar intercourse with these great saints. He was not however present at the closing scene of the life of St. Malachi. It was now high time that he should return home ; and at the latter end of October, he set out to go back to Sempringham. Both St. Bernard and St. Malachi loved him well ;¹ each of them gave him his staff, that he might take a memorial of them back to England ; and St. Bernard

¹ Gilbert's biographer says, that he alone was present when the two saints, by their prayers, worked a miracle, but what it was is unknown.

gave him a stole and a maniple. He went on his way to the work which had been appointed for him ; there was still a great deal for him to do on earth ; but on the second of November, All Souls' day, St. Malachi died, and was buried in St. Mary's chapel at Clairvaux.

CHAPTER VII.

The Canons of Sempringham.

THERE were many persons ready to welcome Gilbert when he got back to England ; all, who before he went to France were anxious to give portions of ground to endow a monastery of his institute, were more than ever disposed to assist him now that St. Bernard's name was added to his own.¹ In the two years after his return, he must have been wholly occupied in founding houses of his order ; Alexander of Lincoln died before he left England, but Robert de Chesney, his successor, was blamed by his historian, for injuring the revenues of his diocese by his liberality to the order of Sempringham, so much did he love Gilbert and his institute.² Nay, when Chicksand had been founded by the countess of Albemarle for the Gilbertines, and she was living there with her nuns, news were brought her that her son was dead, and that his kinsmen, without consulting her, were bearing his body to Walden priory. In her frantic grief, she ordered a band of armed men to bring the body by force to her, at Chicksand, that it might lie in

¹ Innocent III., in a bull of Confirmation addressed to the priory of Alvingham, says, that the order was instituted by "the holy Gilbert and the blessed Bernard." Monast. Angl. vii. 961.

² Wharton Ang. Sac. ii. 417.

the church of the nuns ; and had not the knights who accompanied the body ridden by the side of the coffin with drawn swords, it would have been carried away. The enthusiasm for the Gilbertine order spread beyond Lincolnshire, and the immediate neighbourhood of Sempringham, into Yorkshire, where two houses were founded in 1150, Watton and Malton. The first priory founded, was that of Sempringham itself ; and Gilbert of Ghent gave the land on which the house was built.¹ “ The nobles of England, says his biographer, earls and barons, seeing and approving the work of the Lord, gave to the holy father Gilbert, many lands and possessions ; first in so doing, was Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, and lastly, king Henry II.” Many of these monasteries were situated in Lincolnshire, in solitary islands formed by rivers, and among the reeds and willows of the marshy grounds. Gilbert’s name was known all over England ; he appears in the chronicles of the time, side by side with kings and princes. William of Newbridge mentions him as a man “ really wonderful, and of singular skill in the direction of females, conscious of his own purity, and relying on grace from on high,” and his name was mentioned with reverence in the holiest cloisters. St. Aelred preached of him to his monks, and called him “ the holy father Gilbert, a man venerable and to be mentioned with the highest honour.”² The contemporaries of Gilbert must have been conscious of some substantial benefit derived from him, who was to all appearance only a retiring and simple parish priest ; for many years after he

¹ Gilbert did not give the land free of service ; his descendant, another Gilbert, gave it in eleemosynam, i. e. free ecclesiastical tenure. For an explanation of the term, see Constitutions of Clarendon, c. 9. where it is opposed to *laicus feudus*.

² St. Aelred, Sermon 2. in *Isaiæ* cap. xiv.

came back from France, he was not even a monk, and had not received the habit at the time of which we are writing. And this reverence is the more remarkable, because it continued after his death, soon after which his order degenerated ; nay, it showed the germs of this degeneracy even in his life-time. Now that the institute has, by the addition of the canons, attained its perfection, it will be right to give a more minute account of it. We shall then see what was the benefit which the world owed to Gilbert, notwithstanding the partial failure of his work.

The peculiarity of the order consisted in the institution of a certain number of canons to be the spiritual guides of nuns. Among the Premonstrants, there were nuns as well as canons, but then the nuns were an after-thought ; while in the case of the White Gilbertines, as they were called, the original institute began with the religious women, and all the rest grew up around them, and were established for their use. In Gilbert's original intention, every house of nuns was to have seven canons connected with it, who were to be the directors of the nuns ; so that every Gilbertine priory consisted in fact of three monasteries, one for nuns, another of canons, and a third of lay-brethren. This mode of government had, in a manner, been forced upon him since the Cistercians refused to help him. The great problem in monastic government, was the jurisdiction to which they were to submit. This was met, as has been said elsewhere, by the formation of congregations, first the Cluniac, and then the Cistercian.¹ If this was necessary in the case of monks, it was much more indispensable in nunneries. A convent of women is necessarily dependent on men for the administration of

¹ Life of St. Stephen, p. 155.

the sacraments ; they must, therefore, necessarily be under external direction ; and in the choice of it should not be left to their own caprice. The want of external discipline had ruined many a nunnery. A number of houses were to be found, the inmates of which, calling themselves Canonesses, could give very little account of themselves, and were really relaxed nuns of the order of St. Benedict.¹ As late as the twelfth century, councils were forced to take notice of nuns who wore rich furs, of sables, martins, and ermine, whose fingers were covered with rings of gold, and their long tresses curled or platted ; another speaks of disorderly nuns, who, while they ought to sleep and take their meals together in a dormitory and refectory, lived each in her own house without any restraint, and receiving whom she would.² Such nunneries as these were really nothing more than alms-houses for unmarried women. The idea of the Gilbertine order was to obviate this difficulty, by joining to the nunneries an order of canons for the spiritual direction of the nuns.

Females require direction in a different way from men. It is the unruly intellect of man which leads him into error, while a woman errs from disorganized affections and untamed feelings ; and, what is most pitiable to think upon, often those who aim highest, have the most terrible and signal fall. She who moves along the beaten path of life without being either very good or very bad, is in little danger of fanaticism ; while she who is placed above ordinary ties and affections, and strives to fix her desires on God alone, finds at once a class of temptations of which others have no concep-

¹ Helyot, *Ordres Mon.* vol. ii. p. 58.

² Council of London, 1139, 2nd Lateran council. Vid. Geroch. quoted above, p. 59, and council of Rheims.

tion. The devil placed before our Lord temptations so subtle, that we can hardly tell the meaning of them, or discover how it would have been sin to yield to them. Again, in the unfathomable mystery of those words, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? spoken upon the cross by Him who was Very God, it is possible to gather that the soul, most closely united to God, may be deprived of the consciousness of His presence in an incomprehensible way. All these are temptations, pressing upon the highest souls, of a kind quite different from those which beset the path of commonplace christians. And to withstand these, it requires an implicit faith, and an utter resignation of the will, which very few possess. Hence, the wild and terrible forms of fanaticism which have appeared from time to time in persons, who, with proper guidance, might have been Sisters of Charity or contemplative nuns. On the other hand, by the sweet and gentle ways of holy obedience, a character is formed of a nature distinct from any other, and which no austerities can alone bestow. Of course, God in His mercy can guide peaceful and holy souls through any difficulties even without these aids, but it is dangerous to be without them, for who can stand in the hour of trial when it comes across the soul that after all she may be contemplating herself instead of God, and all her feelings may be illusion? A gentle voice is needed to bid the soul wait in darkness till God give her light, as He assuredly will do, sooner or later.

On the other hand, corresponding to these trials, there are joys in contemplation which ordinary souls cannot know. They are described by those who have felt them with a substantive clearness, which shows even to those who have never felt them, that there

is a deep philosophy in the cross which simple and crucified souls can know, but which is beyond the reach of the mere student, however learned he may be. We are so tied down to things of sense, that we can only aim at immaterial and invisible things through sensible objects ; spiritual things can only be discerned by spirit, and therefore can but be understood by us indirectly, till our bodies, after the blessed resurrection, become spiritual. But it is possible to conceive that there is a way of seeing the invisible, analogous to, and yet totally distinct in kind from, the perceptions of sense ; and for a short time, and in a small degree, God has vouchsafed such an opening of the invisible world to His saints on earth. Few, indeed, there are to whom such a grace is given, but there are many states short of this to which more ordinary souls may attain, remembering, all the while, that of the highest, as well as the lowest, charity is the essence, and that which alone gives them value. Obedience to authority, which comes to us in the place of God, and humility, are the steps by which the Holy Spirit thus exalts souls dead to the world and to themselves. It was to produce in the soul these virtues that the Gilbertine canons were instituted, and what were the general results of the system may be gathered from one case which is confessedly an extraordinary one. “ In one of the monasteries, says St. Aelred, which, under the venerable father Gilbert, are daily sending up to heaven plentiful fruits of chastity, there was once, and perhaps may be still, a holy virgin, and she had so expelled from her breast all love of the world and carnal affections, all care for bodily wants and outward anxiety, that with a burning soul she loathed earthly things, and longed after heavenly. And sometimes it happened, that when her

mind was occupied in her wonted prayer, a mysterious and wondrous sweetness would come over her and put an end to all the movements of the soul, to all quick-coming thoughts, nay, even all those spiritual thoughts which concerned her friends. Then her soul, in a manner bidding adieu to all worldly burdens, would be rapt above itself ; it would be caught up by a strange ineffable and incomprehensible light, so that it saw nothing else but That which is, and which is the being of all. Nor was this a bodily light or any likeness of a bodily thing ; it was not extended nor shed abroad, so that it could be seen everywhere ; without being contained itself, it contained all things, and that in a wonderful and ineffable manner, just as Being contains all that is, and truth whatever is true. When, therefore, this light was shed around her, then she began to know Christ no longer after the flesh, for the breath of her nostrils, Christ Jesus had led her into the truth itself. After lying a considerable time in this trance, the sisters could only with difficulty bring her back to her bodily senses, by shaking her. This happened several times, and they entreated her to explain what took place in these trances. Then began the others to long to attain to the height of this vision : wherefore, they strove to withdraw their minds from all worldly cares and anxieties ; and by tears and continued prayers many obtained the same grace, so that among the sisters, many were, even against their will, plunged into this light. There was there in the convent a nun of consummate good sense, and she, knowing that it is not right to trust to every spirit, thought that this state was to be attributed to disease or fantastic illusions, and as much as she could, tried to dissuade the sisters from having these visions frequently. One day she asked

the Superioress why no such thing happened to herself, and she received for answer, Because thou dost not believe us, nor love in others that virtue which thou hast not thyself. Then the nun answered, Do thou pray to God for me, that if this be from Him, the same thing may happen to me. And when they had prayed for some days to no purpose, she asked the same question of the Superioress, who answered, Thou must renounce all the things of this world, and affections for every mortal, and employ thyself in thinking about God alone. What, said she, am I not to pray for my friends and benefactors? Then, answered the Superioress, when thou wouldest ascend by contemplation to the higher powers of thy soul, thou must commend and entrust to God all whom thou lovest; and as though thou wert quitting this world, bidding adieu to every creature, raise up thy soul to the sight of Him whom thou lovest. She, however, still believed not, but begged of her to pray yet more, that if these things came from God, she should receive what she desired. Still she said, I would not have my soul so rapt from the body and raised on high, that the remembrance of all things, and above all, of my friends, should be wiped away from my mind; I shall be satisfied to know whether these things be of God. Now, on the day of Pentecost, when she was tossing about with anxious thoughts, the light of which we have spoken was shed upon her, so that she was wafted up into it in an unspeakable manner, and was raised on high. Then unable to bear with her weak vision that inaccessible light which was beaming upon her, she prayed that her soul should be recalled, as far as it might, to the contemplation of the passion of the Lord. Then, though she had before seen in a rapid glance that which is very being, she was

suffered to descend from this lofty vision to a lower one, and was transferred in spirit to that vision of the Passion, and saw in the spirit Jesus hanging on the cross, pierced with the nails, smitten through with the lance, and the blood flowing through the five wounds, and Him looking on herself with a most tender look. Then bursting into tears, and repenting, she begged pardon of her sisters, and declared herself unworthy of this light." There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, and we might have learned this from him who was carried up into the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body he knew not, and heard things which human words could no more express than the eye can hear, or the ear see.

And who were these in whom God showed forth these wonders? They were not persons sitting with their hands across all day following the fancy or the feeling of the moment; their vestments were not long and flowing, nor their veils elegantly disposed about their foreheads; their churches were not magnificent, nor did beautiful strains of devotional music float from the pealing organ through their long-drawn cloisters. They were simply little, quiet looking nuns of St. Benedict; the wimple which enveloped their head and throat was plain and coarse, and so was their veil; and even the ample cuculla or long white¹ mantle which they wore in choir was not to sweep along the ground,² "for they who delight in this or in beauty of apparel without doubt are rejected of God."³ For the winter they had a tippet of rough sheep-skin, and a cap lined with white lamb's wool, for it was very cold when they

¹ Cuculla alba, Reg. ap. Dugdale vii. p. lxxix. 18.

² Panni quibus capita earum involvuntur nigri erunt et grossi, v. Reg. p. 79. 17.

³ Ibid.

rose in the night and went into the church, when the wind blew across the fens of Lincolnshire, or the chill mist rose from the waters of the river which surrounded their little islands. Instead of being idle, during all the hours when in the Benedictine or Cistercian rule the monks were working in the fields, they were preparing the wool from their own sheep, baking¹ or washing, or cutting out the clothes of the canons for the work of the lay-sisters, or cooking for themselves and the whole community. At other times they all sat together in the cloister, some of them reading learned books in a learned language, for there were literate ladies among them ; but all, whether poring over homely English or majestic Latin, sat in perfect silence, and it was especially enjoined that there were to be no cross looks, but all were to have a cheerful and sweet countenance as became sisters. Even on the great feast-days, when ordinarily exempt from work, if the poor lay-sisters were over-burdened, the nuns were to quit their books, or even their prayers, and to help them. No music was allowed in their churches, but only grave and simple chaunts, like the Cistercians, except that they could not of course, as in the Cistercian rule, forbid womanish voices ; and the chaunts proceeding in the stillness of the night from so many female voices must have been most sweet and beautiful. No great quantity of wax lights were allowed in the church, and altogether the same Cistercian simplicity was observed in all the details of the service. In one instance only this simplicity was relaxed to condescend to the lay sisters ; in a Cistercian church, instead of elaborate sculpture and canopied niches, no image was

¹ Moniales de pistrino, Reg. p. lxxviii. 16.

allowed but the one crucifix on the altar. But if an image of the "blessed Virgin Mary" were given to the convent, it might be given to the altar of the sisters, to remind them of her perpetual virginity, which they were to emulate. And even when the canons and the nuns made processions round the cloister, on the greatest days in the year, so little was picturesque effect aimed at, that curtains were hung round on the columns of the arches, lest the brethren and the nuns should catch glimpses of each other as the procession with cross and banner wound round the corners of the choir, or might be seen through the interstices of the windows. Meditation was the soul of the order ; the nuns rose about two o'clock in the morning, like the Cistercians, and when matins were over, all who chose remained behind in the church, or glided in afterwards from the cloister ; and as day dawned, the first light of morning saw them still upon their knees pouring out their hearts before God, and meditating on the adorable mysteries of the faith, or interceding for the world without, and for the friends whom they had left there. At all times, day or night, when they were not at work or in the office, they might go into the church and pray. Even those who could not read or join in the office could meditate, and though they were set to work while the others were reading, yet they were allowed to enter the church if they would.¹ If to all this we join the austerity of the Cistercian rule, that is, the unmitigated rule of St. Benedict, there will be but little room left for romance or sentiment. Unmurmuring

¹ This seems to have been the distinction between the nuns who could not read and the lay-sisters. The rule calls these nuns *sanctimoniales laicæ*, while what we call lay-sisters are there called *sorores* in opposition to the *sanctimoniales*.

obedience to superiors, whether the prioress or the canon, as spiritual director, and a perfect resignation of the will were the necessary conditions of being a nun at all.

The canons who had the spiritual care of the nuns, were very different from the old Benedictine or from the Cistercian monks ; the monk was not by any means necessarily a learned man ; on the contrary, his business was to labour with his own hands to get his living, so that he had much more to do with gardening and digging than with books. But the canon was necessarily a clerk and a student ; Gilbert's first canons were taken from among his scholars, whom he had instructed in all the learning of Paris. Canons in the middle of the eleventh century were by no means always reputable personages : the old reform of St. Chrodegang, and the regulations of Aix-la-Chapelle had died away, and the canons were in many instances in a most corrupt state. The vehement remonstrances of St. Peter Damian had their effect, and the attention of the supreme pontiffs were drawn to this enormous evil, so that after the second Lateran council, reforms were continually made in the old canons, and new congregations set up. The institution of monks instead of the canons in several of our cathedrals was a portion of this movement ; and the canons of St. Victor of Paris and the Premonstrants were all connected with it. The second Lateran council ordered all canons to take St. Augustine's rule, and from this time they were called Augustinian. This rule consists of an adaptation of St. Augustine's 109th letter¹ to the condition of can-

¹ It is a question whether this letter (the 211th in the Benedictine edition) or the two sermons *de moribus clericorum*, is the rule pointed out in the Lateran council. But the letter is what is probably meant by Gilbert.

ons instead of nuns. This letter is what is meant when the rule of St. Augustine is mentioned in Gilbert's rule ; it is however so very general in its regulations that canons were not necessarily under a discipline so severe as that of monks. The chief regulation consisted in living together and giving up property ; but besides this in particular places a stricter discipline was in force. Thus Gilbert filled up St. Augustine's outline from other sources, but principally from the Cistercian rule. They were of the new order of monks of the twelfth century, who scandalized¹ the ancient Benedictines, Cluniacs and canons, by wearing white instead of the old sober black of the monastic orders. And in this they were followers of the Cistercians and Premonstrants ; they were, like them, the growth of the age of St. Bernard, and had more subjective religion, so to speak, than appeared on the surface in the older monasteries. This of course is but a question of degree, for the Christian, in every case, looks beyond himself at Him who is the object of his faith ; but yet it is true that the Gilbertines, like the Cistercians, preferred the "usefulness of wholesome meditation,"² to beautiful paintings and sculptures. In their habit they had more of the canon than of the monk, though indeed the white scapular for labour had something monastic in it ; but the tippet of rough sheep-skin over the black tunic looks like the original aumuce of the canon, and they wore a white pallium or mantle, lined with lamb's wool, instead of the monk's cuculla. At mass and on feast days, they laid aside the coarse mantle, and wore a white cope of linen, like the cuculla of the monk, ex-

¹ Vid. Orderic Vit. lib. iii. p. 711.

² Reg. p. l. 15.

cept that it had no sleeves ; in this cope they were buried, for it was the proper habit of canons. In the relations between the canons and the nuns, Gilbert had an eye to his old office in Alexander of Lincoln's court. As it was the theory that all the priest's power in hearing confessions emanated from the Bishop, so the prior of Sempringham, as master of the whole order, gave license to hear confessions ;¹ and as the diocese had a penitentiary, so there was a sacerdos confessionis, who confessed the nuns generally. Besides this, the intention was, that every convent of nuns should have at least seven canons attached to it, who said mass and had the ordinary spiritual direction of the nuns, under the authority of the prior.² The whole of these regulations were so managed, that the canons and the nuns never saw each other, except when a nun was at the point of death, and the priest entered to administer extreme unction, and to commend her soul into the hands of God. The nuns were unseen when they made their confessions, or received the Holy Sacrament, for which purposes a grating was constructed. The time of death alone brought the canons and nuns together. There were two separate churches, and across that of the nuns was built a screen ; when a choir-sister died, her body, dressed in her habit, was laid before the altar, so that the canons might come and chaunt the service for the

¹ Priores ordinis nostri de licentia magistri generalem habent auctoritatem omnium canonicorum confessiones audiendi, Reg. p. xxxii. 5.

² This does not appear so much from the Gilbertine rule itself, as from the confirmation of the rule by Innocent III. Adjacimus ut unicuique domui vestri ordinis sanctimonialium canonici præponantur quibus animarum cura, pro dispositione prioris imminet.

dead about her.¹ The whole convent in procession, accompanied any one of its members to the grave, whether canon or nun, lay-brother or sister.

We have now got the whole of Gilbert's institute complete, as far as regards each individual convent, but there is another and most important portion, and that is the jurisdiction of the monasteries among themselves. In this respect, it must be confessed that the rule was defective. Gilbert was at great disadvantage; when the Cistercians refused to take the institute into their hands, he was forced to construct for himself a complicated system out of the rules of various monastic orders. The Cistercians again were said to have two houses in every one of their monasteries, one of monks, the other of lay-brethren; Gilbert had four, one of canons, another of nuns, a third of lay-brethren, and a fourth of lay-sisters. Part of these rules he gathered from the Cistercians, and part seems to come from the Premonstrants, who had just been established in England.² The result of the whole is an intricate system, which leaves a feeling of indistinctness on the mind of the reader. The principal difficulty in the order is evidently the management of the lay-brethren. In the Cistercian order, the monks worked so much them-

¹ P. 91. l.—There is some obscurity in the way in which these churches are mentioned, but the church of the nuns is distinctly named, Reg. p. l. 17. and that of the canons, xlix. 14. It would seem that the church of Sempringham had been turned into a conventual church, while that of Tirington remained a parish church. At least the latter is not mentioned in the list of the possessions of the order, in Innocent's confirmation.

² The Circatores of the Gilbertines seem to be derived from the order of the Premonstrants, the provinces of which were called Circariæ.

selves, and were so numerous, that the lay-brethren had comparatively a light office. But the Gilbertine canons were few, and were students, so that the brethren had nearly the whole work to perform for all four communities. Besides which it should be remembered that the canons were an after-thought, and an unexpected addition to the labour of the brethren. In a future chapter, it will be found that this was a most serious evil ; the practical working of the whole will then come before us, and the reader will be better able to judge of the defects of this portion of the institute.

CHAPTER VIII.

Gilbert and St. Thomas.

WHEN in the year 1150, Gilbert founded so many houses of his order, he might fairly have considered himself as an old soldier, who had won a title to rest. He was then between sixty and seventy years old ; but he had yet many years of life to go through, and they were to be the least peaceful of all. He had hitherto remained in quiet at Sempringham, but now another hand was to bind him and lead him in his old old age whither it would. From the first time that he set sail on the channel, and touched the shores of France, he was to have trouble and vexation, and tedious journeys to and fro. He was at peace when he was the parish priest of Sempringham, with only seven holy virgins to rule, all of whom he had known from their childhood. But now the Pope had made him the head of his order ; he was now a great man, and had property under his controul, houses and churches, mea-

dows and corn-fields, islands and fisheries. He found to his cost that property involved care ; he was now in danger of becoming the mere man of business. He had to be on horseback, and to ride about from convent to convent, attended by his chaplains and a lay-brother. Nay, he found what was worse than all, that possessions involved law-suits ; he had to renew his acquaintance with the palaces of bishops, and come into the courts of chancellors and high justiciars. And when the king was in Normandy, to and fro, he had to sail across the seas, to have his cause decided. He had often to bear cold looks and sneers of contempt, nay, in defending the rights of his church, he was ill-treated by some powerful tyrant, and even beaten. He was now in a good school for humility, and he rejoiced in the humiliation which God had sent him to make him like his Lord. What these law-suits were about, the scanty notice of his biographer does not tell us, but there was another anxiety upon him which we can easily imagine for ourselves, and that was the care of so many churches, and so many souls. What he had begun in simple faith as a part of the government of his parish, had now grown into an order, and before he died, nine houses of nuns and canons together, and four of canons alone, had been founded, so that he had under his direction fifteen hundred nuns, and seven hundred canons. In the rule of this large body he had to preserve his soul from partiality to particular persons or places, lest it should withdraw his mind from the attention due to the whole. In order to keep his mind fixed upon God alone, he lived a life of greater austerity than seemed possible for his now aged body. He followed the usual exercises of the convent, and was therefore always in the refectory with the canons,

but his meals were so slender as to be a continued mortification. By his side he ever had a platter, which he called the Lord's dish, and into this he threw the greater part of what was set before him, that it might be given to the poor. At night, when compline was over, and the whole convent at rest, he remained in prayer, interceding for all his brethren and sisters, for prelates and kings, for the dead, and for the living. All night long he continued sitting on his bed, without laying his head on a pillow, and in this posture he slept, his head resting on his chest. God so rewarded his servant, that whatever he did, his soul was ever fixed on God in prayer ; to assist himself he made a sort of rosary of his fingers, reciting some prayer on each of the joints. He loved the sweet voice of the church in her chaunts, and tears ran down his cheeks when he was singing hymns and canticles in the choir.¹ But his tears were not always those of devotion and joy, he wept with those who wept, and especially bemoaned with tears over the impenitent, who would not weep for themselves. In the direction of so many souls he met with many forms of the tempter's wiles, and many sins ; and in the difficult management of such cases, he tempered severity with kindness. " We have seen him," says his disciple, " when any one had sinned even to deserve excommunication, and then repented, at first appear hard-hearted, and almost inexorable, in order to try the contrition of the penitent ; but, when he saw that the penitence was true and sincere, he shed tears in the presence of all, and called together his friends and brethren, and made all rejoice with him over the once lost sheep. Thus afflicting himself, and

¹ *Sauve sonantis vocibus ecclesiæ illectus. Vita St. Gilb. p. 16.*

suffering with the afflicted, he followed Jesus with his cross."¹ For some time he would not formally enter his own order ; he probably wished to be more able to give up his charge before he died, but at last he was persuaded to do so, lest the royal authority should take occasion to appoint his successor, and make of Sempringham a sort of commendatory priory. He therefore at Bullington priory received the habit at the hands of Roger, prior of Malton, one of his original canons, whom he made in every thing his chief adviser.

He continued in this mode of life till the year 1164, when it might seem that his life was now drawing to a close ; he had outlived all the saints of his day, St. Norbert and St. Malachi had long been at rest, and now St. Bernard was gone too, and Pope Eugenius. He had seen the last days of the Conqueror, and had lived through the days of the Red King, and of Henry, and in the troublous times of Stephen, he had dwelt at peace, and had peacefully founded his monasteries, and ruled his nuns ; and now a new king was on the throne, powerful as the Conqueror, passionate as his successor, and withal wily and clever as Henry Beauclerc. Gilbert had in his youth seen St. Anselm's struggle with the secular power, and now a more deadly battle was awaiting the church, in which he too was to take his share.² The battle had begun, and the church had gained her point in Stephen's time ; Henry Murdach had been made archbishop of York, in the king's teeth, and the liberty of election vindicated. Gervase, Stephen's son, had been degraded from the

¹ Ibid.

² John of Hexham, in ann. 1154.

abbacy of Westminster, the revenues of which he had wasted ; and Theobald, after vindicating an archbishop's right to cross the channel in obedience to the mandate of the Holy See, had returned in triumph, having laid the royal domain under an interdict ; finally in 1151, a council, held in London, had asserted the privileges of the ecclesiastical courts against the pleas of the barons. But Henry Plantagenet was a very different man from Stephen, who was only a chivalrous asserter of a disputed crown ; he was a reformer, and the ecclesiastical courts must needs square with his reforms ; they must not come in the way of circuits and justices in eyre, and the king's lieges must not be excommunicated without his leave, though they have transgressed ecclesiastical law, and parish churches must be given away according to the decisions of the courts of my lord the king ; and to clench the whole, England must be separated from the head of the church, for no appeals to Rome must interfere with the king's justice.

Henry knew not what he had done, when he called Thomas his chancellor, and said to him, "It is my will that thou be archbishop of Canterbury." Nay, the noble-minded chancellor knew not the meaning of his own words, when he pointed to his gay dress and said with a smile, "Truly a religious man and a holy thou wouldst place in this holy seat, over so holy and famous a convent of monks ; know well, that if by God's will it should be so, thou wilt very soon turn thy soul away from me, and the good-will which there is now between us will be turned into the most savage hatred. I know well that thou wouldst make exactions, yea, that thou dost now dare much in church matters, which I could not bear." It was a good

stroke of policy in Henry ; the Pope wished it, and the bishops, and the clergy wished it ; it would cement so firmly the good feeling between church and state. But Thomas knew Henry better ; and he knew too what an archbishop of Canterbury could do if he would. However Henry had his will, and to the joy of all but himself, Thomas was consecrated archbishop. But a very few years after, the scene was much changed ; the king's famous constitutions, his scheme of church reform, had been brought forward. Thomas opposed it, for he saw through the meaning of them. He was deserted by the bishops ; some could not, others would not see ; they saw that Henry's eyes looked fiery, and they gave up the church's liberty. Thomas yielded for a moment ; he received the constitutions, but asked for more time to consider them before he put his seal to them. The seal was never put ; the inferior ecclesiastics in general, the smaller abbeys, and sisterhoods of nuns, and the parish priests, as a body, all felt a strong and almost instinctive sympathy all through the contest, with the archbishop, and now his momentary weakness filled the hearts of those about him with dread. As they were going home from the council, his attendants whispered among each other sad words about the fortunes of the church, and one, the cross-bearer, who rode before him, murmured something about a victory won over the general, and now it was useless for others to fight. The archbishop heard his words and said, " Why sayest thou this, my son ; " when the cross-bearer spoke his mind openly, then that noble heart was well nigh broken, and he sighed deeply, for he saw his error. " No wonder," he thought ; " the church may well become a servant through my means. I came to rule her, not from the

school of Christ, not from the cloister, but from the king's court, a courtier proud and vain. I, the leader of buffoons, the master of hounds, the nurturer of hawks. I, to be the shepherd of so many souls." Then tears in abundance broke forth, and he sobbed aloud. However the battle was not yet lost, and so the king felt, as soon as it was known that the archbishop had repented. Henry's temper was none of the best, and much less would have been enough to try it. That his chancellor, the man of his creation, the warlike arch-deacon, who loved the noise of battle so well, that he gratuitously plunged into it, the gay courtier in the ermine cloak, the acute diplomatist, learned in the law, that he should turn against him and set up for a saint ! It was too much, and he vowed vengeance. It was his own fault ; he did not know what a heart beat under that ermine cloak, what a hatred of impurity and an unsullied chastity were there, even in its most worldly times. There was stuff to make a martyr of in that noble heart, now that God's grace had touched it, and Thomas listened like a little child to his own cross-bearer, to John of Salisbury, or any friend who reproved him. But whoever was to blame, it was now too late, and the archbishop must be got rid of. In 1164, articles of impeachment were framed against him, grounded on his conduct as chancellor ; this was coming near the question at issue, whether an ecclesiastic was amenable to a civil tribunal. The bishops deserted him ; one or two secretly assisted him, among whom, it must be said, was Henry of Winchester, who, from an instinctive liking for what was great, or because his visit to Cluny had improved him, took his part. As a body however, the bishops left him to the tender mercies of the king.

The proceedings of the court are obscure, but it appears that on the first days of the trial, heavy and ruinous fines were imposed on the archbishop; the cowardice of the bishops apparently encouraged the king, and it was intimated to Thomas, that on the last day he should have to defend himself on a criminal charge of perjury and treason. From Thomas's indignant words to the bishops, it seems that he made a distinction between a civil and a criminal action, and refused to be amenable to the royal tribunal in the latter case. The former accusations respected his conduct when chancellor; this one called him in question for what he had done as archbishop. Frightful rumours were afloat that the archbishop was to be murdered in the court. At this terrible time, when all shrunk from his side, one unknown monk, the representative of many a poor brother and sister who were praying for him, bade him the next day celebrate a mass in honour of the blessed first martyr, Stephen, and so he should escape his enemies. Thomas trembled, after having so lately lived a secular life, he thought himself unfit to wear the crown of martyrdom; yet not for one moment did his heart shrink from what he had to do.¹ The next day, though it was no holy-day, in full pontificals, with the mitre on his head, and the pallium round his neck, he celebrated the mass in honour of St. Stephen. Some of the king's attendants who were in the church, wondered what it meant, but they wondered still more when, fresh from the sacrifice in which he had offered up himself with the immaculate Lamb, he took the

¹ Et adhuc conjicio ex his quæ dicitis vos non solum in civili sed in criminali causa, in foro sæculari, judicare me paratos. *Quadril. i. 29.*

cross from the hand of his attendant, and in the sacred vestments he made his way towards the king's court. All shrunk back before him. The bishops stood aghast ; it was a proclamation of open war ; it stripped the question of all legal form, and made it start up in all its naked awfulness ; the archbishop must die, or the constitutions be accepted. By God's grace neither happened. The king and the barons did not await him ; it was bringing the question to an issue a little too soon, and they retired to an inner room. It was a pale and trembling troop which they left behind, the bishops of England cowering around the majestic figure of the archbishop. Quietly he sat, with a young clerk, his attendant at his feet ; and when some of the officials from the king's chamber came down and glared fiercely on him, he only bent his head, and spoke words of comfort to the poor youth. At length judgment was pronounced that the archbishop was a traitor and a perjured man. Then in came Robert, earl of Leicester, with a troop of barons, and bade him come to the king, to answer the impeachment, or hear his sentence at once. Sentence ! said the archbishop, and with the cross still in his hand, he rose up and continued, "Nay, Lord earl, my son, hear thou first ;" and he refused this impeachment before a civil tribunal, and then appealed to the pope. His last words were, "And thus, by authority of the church and the apostolic see, I go hence." Then he quietly walked down the hall, and the nobles and courtiers followed him all the way with outcries and abuse, but none durst stop an archbishop so habited, and with such a weapon. The door was locked, the keys were hanging against the wall, and one of the archbishop's attendants took them down, and trying one after another, he found the right one,

and the archbishop passed forth from the hall from which he never thought to have come alive.

During this contest, and indeed throughout the whole of the momentous struggle, it was evident who were on the archbishop's side, and who were against him. All in authority shrunk from him ;¹ but while the bishops were afraid to support him, the clerks, who attended them, openly expressed their sympathy ; thus, when Roger, archbishop of York, was withdrawing from the court for fear of what was coming, he met two of his clerks and bade them follow him. But one of them, master Robert, said : " I will not go from hence till I have seen what God's will comes of these matters ; if my lord of Canterbury fight for God and for His justice even unto blood, he cannot end his life more nobly." And, as was afterwards proved, this held good with the monastic orders ; the heads of the Cistercian order in England shrunk from the storm when Henry threatened to drive every white monk out of his realm, if they continued to shelter the archbishop ; but the abbot of Circumpanum² was not afraid of Henry's anger, and entering into his very presence, delivered a message from the archbishop ; and many a poor English monk ventured his white habit among Henry's armed retainers for the same purpose, till the barons advised the king to extirpate the order, and Henry wrote a letter of complaint

¹ Reliqui vero fere omnes in inferioribus gradibus constituti personam vestram sinceræ charitatis brachiis amplexantur altis sed in silentio suspiriis implorantes ut Sponsus Ecclesia ad glorium sui nominis felici vota vestra secundet eventum.—St. Thomas Ep. i. 85. ap. Lup. op. Tom. x. p. 110.

² Ep. ii. 84. There may be some mistake in the name of this Abbey, which can no where be found, but the fact is certain.

to the abbot of Citeaux.¹ But it was not only the Cistercian authorities, but those of the Carthusians and of the order of Grandmont, that Henry duped.² There was, however, an order which steadily, and from the first, took part with the archbishop, and that was the Gilbertine. When, after the council of Northampton, Thomas determined to fly from England, and rose at night from his bed in the church of the Cluniac convent of St. Andrew, we find a poor brother of the order of Sempringham at his side, to guide him through the wild swamps of the country, to the city of Lincoln. From thence, he went down the river for the space of forty miles, and the little boat threaded its way among the watery wastes and fens of Lincolnshire, till they landed on a lonely spot, surrounded on all sides by water, a hermitage belonging to the order of Sempringham.³ Here he remained in security for three days, for no one would have dreamed of meeting his lordship of Canterbury in that dreary place. But he was glad of this solitary island with its little chapel in the wilderness, for he here recruited his wasted strength before he crossed the sea. He lived on the coarse food of the monks, and when the brother who was attending on him saw him sitting alone at a table, eating vegetables, he burst into tears, and left the room to hide them.

¹ Ep. xxxiv. b. 2. v. also Ep. i. 92.

² Ep. v. 12. where Mr. Froude, apparently by reading *adimplerent* for *adimpleret*, has given a turn to the sentence still more unfavourable to the monastic orders.

³ This is probably "*pastura cum mansura, Johannis quondam heremitæ in marisco de Hoiland*," mentioned in the confirmation of the possessions of the order by Innocent III. noticed above. The place is still shown not far from Tattershall and Coningsby.

His next stage was again a dependency of Sempringham called Haverolot;¹ after this he came out of the intricate wilderness of fens, the little out-of-the-way world of the Gilbertines, into the civilized path of the great world which lay beyond, and he durst not any longer travel by day. He lay hid at Estray, a manor belonging to St. Trinity of Canterbury, till All Souls' day, when a vessel was provided to take him over to France.

Here, in an obscure cove on the coast, was put ashore the archbishop of Canterbury; still he was not out of danger, for when he was chancellor he had opposed the wicked marriage of the earl of Boulogne with an abbess, and the earl would certainly have given him up to Henry. So he put on the white habit of a Cistercian monk, and the rough monkish cloak upon his shoulders, and calling himself brother Christian, trudged on foot through the mire and the rain. He was indeed very little like himself in such a guise as this, but he could not hide himself, and two or three times he was all but discovered. Two men were seen hawking as the party passed along the road, and for a moment Thomas forgot his troubles to fix his eyes upon a beautiful hawk on the sportsman's wrist. Ha! said one of the men, if I mistake not, we have here the archbishop of Canterbury. Fool, said his fellow, what need has the archbishop to walk in

¹ A place called St. Botolph's, is mentioned on the way between the hermitage and Haverolot; it appears likely that this is the villa quæ dicitur Sanctus Botulfus, named in the confirmation; perhaps Haverolot may be the house of the order said to be there. Camden mentions a place called Botolfstoune, near Boston, and the order had lands at Tilney, near the same place. Haverolot was therefore probably in the neighbourhood of Boston.

such gear as this ? He had not gone far before his strength failed him and he sunk down, declaring that he could go no further, and that they must carry him or get him a horse ; so they went and bought him a horse for a few shillings, with a straw bridle into the bargain. As he rode on, equipped in this sorry way, some armed men came up and asked him if he were the archbishop of Canterbury. What ! is it the wont of Canterbury to ride in such trappings as these ? was his answer, and the argument was conclusive, for they looked at the figure besmirched with mud on the sorry steed, and thought it could not be he, who when chancellor, rode at the head of twelve hundred knights. In this guise, about evening, he came into Gravelines, and went to a poor inn to rest for the night. But mine host looked at brother Christian and bethought himself he had seldom seen so majestic a Cistercian before, and when he looked again, he thought that that ample forehead, and long melancholy face, and those delicate hands, could only belong to the archbishop of Canterbury ; and so he told the peasant girl who waited on the guest. And the poor maiden brought him nuts, and cheese, and all she could, to do him honour ; the host too threw himself at his feet, and, notwithstanding his attempts to disguise the truth, he could not but acknowledge who he was. A few days after, he was riding in a very different accoutrement from that in which he entered Gravelines ; when once he got into the territories of the king of France, he was again received as became an archbishop, and rode into St. Bertin attended by a train of the gallant chivalry of France, and Louis received him with open arms.

Meanwhile, Pope Alexander and the cardinals were sadly perplexed ; they had already the emperor and an

antipope to deal with, and that was quite enough without quarrelling with Henry to boot. Besides which, English gold and promises had done its work even in the sacred college ; and prudent men began to think that these were not times to enforce antiquated pretensions ; the archbishop was a chivalrous and high-minded man, but chimerical schemes must not for all that trouble the peace of the kingdom. But all these, the usual excuses of cold hearted men, disappeared when at Soissons the archbishop met the Pope and with simple earnestness laid before him the constitutions of Clarendon. Alexander saw at once what was the question at issue, and none of the cardinals durst propose that these new royal customs should be introduced. But all became breathless with surprise when Thomas took the ring from his finger with which he had been married to his church, and put it into the hands of his Holiness. No wonder, he said, things had gone wrong with him ; he had been placed on the throne of Canterbury, not by the will of God, but by the will of the king ; and now the church of Christ was suffering for his sins. He would not resign to the king, for that would have been a betrayal of the cause of the church, but, “into thy hands, father, I resign the archbishopric of Canterbury.” At these words of a noble-minded man, daily advancing in self-knowledge and humility, many shed tears ; but then in came the prudent men, and they thought the opportunity was a good one ; it was the very thing which was wanted to make things smooth ; it would restore the proper harmony between church and state. But this was a doctrine too ungenerous and cowardly for the Holy See to adopt ; and Alexander restored the ring to Thomas, and refused to accept his resignation. And then he said, Up to this time thou hast abounded in

the good things of this life, but now, in order that thou mayest learn how to be the comforter of the poor, thou must take religious poverty for thy mother, and learn of her. I commend thee, therefore, to the poor ones of Christ ; I mean to this man, he said, pointing to the abbot of Pontigny, who was present. And so Thomas went to the holy abbey of Pontigny, in the broad and rich vale, through which flow the clear waters of the Serain on its way to join the Yonne ; and here, with the good Cistercian monks, he remained in peace. He now, perhaps, for the first time in his life, could sit in solitude and silence and look upon himself ; he would read and meditate on the mighty mysteries of theology, and study the Holy Scriptures, which he used to look upon with an awful wonder when he read them with master Herbert of Lombardy, and used to sigh that he had no more leisure. He had leisure enough now ; and in a course of long and bitter years, he was training up to be a martyr.

Scarcely had Thomas reached Pontigny, when a persecution commenced against his friends in England. Gilbert has his cross too, and we will come to him in time ; but who are all these that crowd around the gates of Pontigny ? Cold, hunger, and nakedness, are evidently playing sad havoc among them. Alas ! they are the friends of Thomas, all who have lifted up a voice or a finger for him, whom now Henry in his rage has expelled from their homes and made them swear to go across the sea to Pontigny, to show the Archbishop what sufferings are endured because he is obstinate. Henry sought out all the kinsfolk of Thomas, all whom he loved best, and all in any way connected with him, and bound them by this terrible oath to present themselves at the Abbey-gates. Delicate females

with infants in their arms fainted by the way in Flanders, and could not come, for it was midwinter ; but Thomas heard of them all from those who could reach him, and they were all names which he had known familiarly. This was the greatest cross of all ; it was in its measure like the pain of our blessed Lord when he from the cross saw His mother suffering with Him. All this might be spared if Thomas would but say a little word, if he would but quit a high-souled dream, and be like other bishops. Then all these could go back to their pleasant homes, to dear England, and be happy again. But Thomas did not shrink for a moment ; this would be coming down from the cross where he was hanging with his Lord, and giving up the bride of Christ, not to the beloved disciple, but to the Roman governor. He wrote to the kings and nobles on the continent who favoured his cause, and the poor exiles were distributed among them. But there were still troubles in England which the Archbishop could not heal ; and Gilbert had his full share in these. He seems to have understood the Archbishop, and the interests which were at stake, better than any one of those who were not his immediate friends. Who indeed understood him thoroughly ? Not certainly that bold cross bearer who amused his indulgent master by asking him how his robe behind came to be so puffed out, and knew not that under his pontifical vestments he wore a shirt of hair ; and who was disposed to smile again when he found that the cowl of the monkish habit which the Pope had sent the Archbishop, was all too short. Nor did the Abbot of Pontigny understand him, when the Archbishop talked of having dreamed that he should be martyred, and the good Abbot with conventual prejudice smiled,

and asked, What has a man who eats and drinks to do with martyrdom? None of them, though they came closest to him, knew what was in him. But Gilbert understood well what he was fighting for, and showed that he was prepared to suffer for the cause. The share which Gilbert's order had had in the escape of the Archbishop out of the kingdom, exposed its head to suspicion. At this time the king was in great dread of the sentence of an interdict proceeding from the Archbishop upon the whole kingdom, and the most savage orders had been issued against any clerk or other person who should bring the sentence into the kingdom. Loss of eyes and burning were a portion of the provisions of this sanguinary enactment. This might be a specimen for Gilbert of what the king was capable of in his wrath. When therefore with all the priors of his order he was summoned to Westminster to clear himself of this suspicion, he knew not what might happen to him. When he arrived in London, he found that he was accused of having sent supplies of money to the Archbishop. This was high treason; but the judges (it was most probably in the court of the earl of Leicester, high justiciar of England) were disposed to be lenient, and to respect his grey hairs and his character for sanctity. They only required of him to take an oath that he had not sent supplies to the Archbishop. This seemed a very simple mode of terminating the affair; but Gilbert bethought himself, that though it was quite true that he had not sent any money, all the world would suppose, if he took the oath, that he thought it wrong to assist the noble exile in his struggle for the rights of the Church. He therefore quietly refused to take the oath. The judges threatened exile; his priors thought it chimerical to

refuse the safety which was offered to him by Providence ; they thought it wrong, and a violation of their vow, to expose themselves to be forced away from their cloisters for a doubtful point of honour. But Gilbert had made up his mind ; he knew how much was at stake, and he thought it worth the risk ; he rejoiced and thanked God that in his old age, after a life of peace, God should now give him grace to bear the reproach of Christ, and to be a confessor for His church. It is a temptation peculiar to monks, to convert their cloister too much into a home, and to set their hearts upon it ; and so it was with the Gilbertine priors, and with other monastic authorities in those days too ; they had given up one home for Christ's sake, and never expected to have to give up another, with which all their religious associations were connected. The great world beyond their cloister was nothing to them, and why should they give up the scene of their duties, to which they were bound by a solemn vow, for any of its turmoils ? And it might have been thought that Gilbert's many years of cloistral life would have made him identify Sempringham with the Church ; but he was now ready to risk the breaking up of his order, and to join the Archbishop in his exile. The judges were sorely puzzled ; they knew not what was to be done with a man who would not take the mercy which they offered him. They were however unwilling to condemn him, so they sent over to Normandy, to know what was the king's pleasure, for Henry was then on the continent.¹ Meanwhile Gilbert and his priors were detained in London, to the sore annoyance of the latter ;

¹ This makes it probable that these events happened in 1164, when Henry was in Normandy.

they might any day be sent at once into exile, as had happened to so many, in a state of destitution into a foreign land. Gilbert had enough to do to keep them in order ; many of them were ready at once to take the oath, and to go back to their convents. He took care to keep up the services just as if they were at Sempringham, and their sweet chaunts were heard by the populace outside : it was a novel thing to hear in London the voices of a set of canons fresh from the fens of Lincolnshire. While all about him were in trembling expectation of the king's sentence, he was unusually gay. It was the instinctive joy of a heart feeling sure that God was for it, because the world was against it. In the very court of Westminster, while all his canons were sitting with long faces about him, he bought some trinkets of a boy who was hawking them about, simply to try to amuse his downcast companions. At length, when all were expecting the very worst, when Gilbert himself had made up his mind to die in France, far away from Sempringham, an order came from Henry, reserving the cause for his special judgment, and ordering the Gilbertines meanwhile to be dismissed. Whether Henry thought that there would be something absurd in thus, in the eyes of all England, banishing a few religious who lived in a swamp, as disaffected and dangerous persons ; or whether, to give him his due, he really admired the unbending character of Gilbert, whom it is expressly said that he revered ; or whether both together be true, at all events so it was, the prior of Sempringham beat king Henry and his justiciars to boot. Then, and not till then, he, without any oath, simply informed the judges that he had not sent any supplies to the Archbishop. This was not an official act at all, and therefore was quite

different from what had been required of him, and he went back to Sempringham, thanking God that he had escaped the snares which had been prepared for him.

CHAPTER IX.

The Rebellion.

GILBERT'S trials are not over yet ; one still awaits him, and that perhaps the worst of all. Some men die young, and do a great work before they die ; others die in middle age, when their powers are first brought into play, and their work beginning to thrive ; others again are spared to become old men, and find their bitterest cross at the last. And so it was with Gilbert ; he had all his life long enjoyed the love and esteem of all about him, and the greatest saints of the age had been his friends ; but now he had to endure the suspicions and the coldness of the good, the shame of evil report, and the ingratitude of those whom he had nurtured. It has been said before that the most imperfect part of the order was the management of the lay-brethren ; and at this time, two instances of most flagrant disorders occurred among them. One of them is an isolated fact, which would be inexplicable if it were not connected with the licentious spirit which appeared about this time among this portion of the order. It does not appear certain whether Gilbert ever knew it at all, for it only occurs in a letter of St. Aelred to one of his private friends ; and from the desperate and wicked efforts made to hush it up, and from the fact that the prior applied to St. Aelred, and not to him, it seems probable that it never reached his ears. Its sickening

details might therefore perhaps have been spared the reader, and yet they are instructive from the deep feeling of humiliation which they leave, or ought to leave, upon the mind. A monastery had been founded, as has been said before, in Yorkshire, in a place so dreary and lonely, and so surrounded with water, that it was called Watton, or the Wet-town. To this house a little girl of four years old had been sent by Henry, Archbishop of York, to be brought up by the nuns. The poor child had always been unruly, and the nuns had never been able to do any thing with her ; and when she grew up, though she wore the veil, she never had the heart of a nun.¹ One day, the lay-brethren² came into the monastery to do some work ; the unhappy maiden lingered near, and watched them intently ; at length her eyes met those of one of them. It is useless to go through the steps which led her to crime ; suffice it that she fell. By and bye her shame could no longer be concealed, and her partner in wickedness fled away. The nuns perceived what had taken place, and now comes the most miserable part of a miserable tale. Instead of taking the fall of one of the inmates of the

¹ The expression is “*suscipitur nutrienda.*” It does not appear from St. Aelred’s narrative that she was offered by the Archbishop as a nun, and thus, according to St. Benedict’s rule, obliged irrevocably to take the veil. Her wearing the habit does not prove it. Not long before this time, Matilda, who had lived from her infancy in the monastery of Wilton, and had been obliged by her aunt to wear the black veil and habit, had been allowed by St. Anselm to marry Henry I. Nor again can it be made out from St. Aelred’s expressions that she had made her profession at all. He certainly does not say that she had.

² *Frater* in the Gilbertine rule always means *lay-brother*, and not *monk*.

house as matter of humiliation, some of the nuns grew frantic with rage ; they had been proud of their chastity, as giving them honour in the sight of men, and now they began to imagine that the finger of scorn would be pointed at them. Instead of rejoicing that by the dispensation of God without their fault, they were despised by men as sinners, as had happened to our blessed Lord, they murmured against God. A party of them cruelly beat and loaded with chains the wretched girl ; their rule obliged them to confine her, but they might have comforted her in her prison, and tried to win her back to Christ. Their next act was to get by stratagem the partner of her guilt into their power, and to execute upon him a sanguinary and horrible vengeance. Instead of trusting that their own purity would be asserted by him who saved St. Agnes from the place of shame, they devised a scheme of fraud in order to conceal the event altogether. It is needless to go into the details of their wickedness ; it is enough that they imposed on St. Aelred, and persuaded him that the girl had repented, and had been miraculously delivered, and that the chains had dropped from her hands. It is remarkable that they did not send for Gilbert to be witness to the miracle, instead of St. Aelred ; they probably thought that they could not impose upon him. But however this be, so runs the tale, and a miserable tale it is, which may make any one tremble who is disposed to pride himself upon his austerities or his purity, forgetting that without charity they are nothing worth. These nuns of Watton were firm and zealous rather for their own honour than for the Lord, and were betrayed into a terrible system of deceit, which now rises up in judgment against them with posterity.

As far as the history of the order is concerned, this

falls in with the account given of the rebellion of the lay-brethren in Gilbert's old age. It was a hard matter to keep in order so many strong and hardy peasants. It required the entire Cistercian system to do so, where every monk was in his way a farmer, and it could not be effected by a few canons, who were literary men. Accordingly it was found that Hodge, the smith, and Gerard, the weaver, had organized a conspiracy among the lay-brethren, to procure a mitigation of the rule. They began to think that after all, a little more eating and drinking, and a little less austerity and psalm-singing, would make life more easy and pleasant. It was soon discovered that they were not the chief promoters of the disobedience of the brethren. Hodge and Gerard were among the lowest of the number ; the former had been taken from the road side, by Gilbert, when a beggar-boy, with his father and brothers, and had been taught the trade of a smith. Their defection would therefore not have been dangerous, but mention is made of two others, to whom Gilbert had entrusted the chief care of the lay-brethren, and these appear to have secretly taken advantage of the vagabond propensities of the smith and the weaver to obtain a mitigation of the rule. Several of the brethren, headed by these two worthies, the weaver and the smith, refused to work, and went about spreading calumnies against the canons of the order. Gilbert, in order to stop the growing disaffection, excommunicated the chief offenders, and required of the rest an oath that they should in future keep to what they had vowed in their profession.¹ There must

¹ This is gathered from St. Thomas of Canterbury's letter, Ep. ii. 69, and also from the letter of the Bishop of Norwich, quoted in Dugdale, after the Gilbertine rule. The whole ac-

have been some clever men among these lay-brethren ; it was an unusual thing to make the profession over again, unless there was reason to suppose that the first profession was invalid. An abbot could not exact it, and Gilbert seems to have overstept his powers¹ in requiring what was equivalent to a second profession. The lay-brethren knew this, and while some of them left the monastery and went all over England maligning the canons, these two, Hodge and Gerard, were sent to Rome to demand justice in the name of the rest. Strange that two runaway brethren, a smith and a weaver, should have the power of obtaining an audience from the supreme pontiff ! but it suits well the Head of the Church to hear the complaint of the poor as well as the great. Not only did they apply for redress, but they obtained an order in their favour, and returned in triumph to Sempringham. Technically they may have been right, but Gilbert, in a few words, quoted from him by his biographer calls it “ a cruel mandate,” and so it was ; all authority was of course at once broken up in the order, and now the lay-brethren were prepared to go all lengths in their attempts to obtain their demands. Gilbert, distressed as he was at the verdict given by his holiness, obeyed it in every point. It was a trying time ; mortified pride, a just indignation at ingratitude, his sense of what was best for the order, which he had raised, and all that complicated feeling, so well expressed by “ being hurt,” would have prompted him to treat the offenders

count is very confused, and all that can be done is to put it together in the best way of which it is capable.

¹ Quod nulla, sicut audivimus, religionis institutio exigere consuevit.—St. Thomas ubi sup.

harshly. But he obeyed the Pope, and took them back into the order.

The brethren now in a body demanded a mitigation of the rule ; but here they found him inflexible. He did not consider whether the rule was too strict or not ; it appears afterwards that he did think it too severe ; but that was not the question then, the brethren asked for it in a wrong way, and they must submit before any thing could be done. His old enemies, Hodge and Gerard, elated by their victory at Rome, now broke all bounds ; they pilfered the community, and with the spoils bought two fine horses, on which they rode about the country, going where they would, and publishing every where the most atrocious falsehoods against the canons. At the same time the rest of the lay-brethren prosecuted their cause with vigour ; Gilbert, in his old age, had to drag his worn-out body from tribunal to tribunal to hear the cause judged. Here he had the right side of the question ; he was their prior, and he alone could release them from the professions which they had made to him ; the Pope indeed who had confirmed the order, might revoke his confirmation, but, till then, no bishop could make him alter the rule ; he could only make him observe it. Many bishops tried to persuade him to mitigate the rule, but he was inflexible ; they must first submit to him. But it was a dreadful trial for Gilbert to have the consciousness that vague reports were afloat in the world against the reputation of his canons. The order was of such a nature that the world was sure to receive with willing ears whatever was said against it. The bitterest cross however to Gilbert must have been the displeasure of the exiled archbishop of Canterbury, of him whom he so loved, for

whom he had risked so much. St. Thomas could only hear vague reports across the sea ; again the former verdict obtained at Rome, was a fact against the Prior, and the subsequent conduct of the lay-brethren looked as if they had never been received back at all into the community, since the Pope's mandate. He therefore wrote to Gilbert a letter of grave rebuke. His affection for him is evident throughout ; "God knoweth," he says, "that we love thee with sincere charity in Christ ;" and he calls the order "the fruits of our labour," as though he identified himself with Gilbert. But he commands him strictly to do his best to call back the brethren who are scattered abroad, and accuses him of disobeying the apostolic see ; and he advises him to mitigate the rule, lest after his days his work should perish.

Poor Gilbert ! good and bad were against him. He could not ride abroad without feeling that the finger of scorn might be pointed at him and his train, in consequence of the calumnies of the false brethren. But, unlike the nuns of Watton, he took it all patiently, because it had come upon him in the way of God's providence. He humbled himself and acknowledged that he deserved it all, and thanked God for the affliction, for it taught him to love none on earth too well. He was now on the verge of the grave ; all his life long he had been honoured, and it would now do him good to be despised. At the same time he felt sure that God would clear up the innocence of his canons ; and so it was ; Hodge and Gerard, in the course of their wanderings on the backs of their high-mettled palfreys, fell into grievous immoralities, and their flagrant licentiousness turned all men against them. There was immediately a re-action

in favour of the canons, as there always is sooner or later in favour of those who have been unjustly treated. There is a retributive justice in public opinion, which, on the long run, rights itself, and repairs its own mischief. Men opened their eyes to the holiness of the order, and soon after, Gilbert had the satisfaction of seeing the unruly brethren submit themselves unconditionally, all except friend Hodge, who persisted in his vices to the end. The brethren only humbly begged of Gilbert to mitigate the rule as he thought fit. Then, and not till then, after he had given the kiss of peace to the penitent, he promised that "in tempering whatever was too rigorous, and in correcting the statutes, he should in all things be guided by the authority of his lordship the pope, and the counsel of religious men." Gilbert was now rewarded for his patience ; it often happens that men step forward at the end of a contest, who, if they had only shown themselves at the beginning, might have saved a great deal of trouble, and it may be, that God so wills it for the perfecting of His saints. So it happened in this case ; many of the English bishops, especially those who lived near the seats of the order, now wrote to the Pope in favour of Gilbert. One of these letters, that of the bishop of Norwich, has been preserved, and is so striking a testimony in favour of the order, that it will be well to quote it at length.

"To the most holy father and sovereign pontiff Alexander, William, bishop of Norwich, the servant of his Holiness, sendeth greeting, and obedience . . . Gilbert, of Sempringham, both from his near neighbourhood to me, as well as from the renown of his sanctity, for which he is so eminent, cannot be unknown to me. His soul is the dwelling of wisdom, and he draws from

the fountains of the Holy Spirit those waters which he knows so well how to pour into the ears of others. In winning and retaining souls for God, he is so zealous and successful, that when I compare myself with him, I am ashamed of my own slothfulness, and it seems as if the prophet Esaias were chiding such as I am, when he says, 'Be ashamed, O Sidon, saith the sea.' Among his nuns, of whom he hath gathered for God a multitude greater than I can number, there burn such a fervid zeal for religion, and careful love of chastity, and so faithfully do they keep apart from seeing or conversing with men, that they realize that scripture which saith, 'My beloved is for me, and I for him, who feedeth among the lilies.' Of his canons, whose innocence I hear has been calumniated to your clemency, I call God and mine own soul to witness, I never remember to have heard a single word of ill fame, and I could not but have heard it from their near neighbourhood to me, and from the multitude of persons who come to me on business. All access to the nuns is so entirely forbidden, that not even the prior has general license to see or speak to any of them, and in the reception of the Holy Eucharist, neither priest nor recipient know one another. Each portion of the community has its own house, its own cloister and church, its own houses for sleeping, meditation and prayer. From his lay-brethren he only requires that they keep inviolate that mode of life, which they have professed, and this in my presence they have promised with much devotion to do. He does not presume to change what has been confirmed by your authority and that of my predecessors, and what they, after long trial, have promised and vowed to observe ; lest if he changed it, he might be open to the charge of laxity and presumption.

All I wish, is, that this law-suit, which certain lukewarm men, of cold charity have entered against him, should be referred to the judgment and witness of men who have a zeal for God according to knowledge, that they may discover the truth by inspecting the privileges granted by the apostolic see, and by the clear examination of facts, men who have known and experienced what it is to observe a rule without tiring of the religious life, or looking back after putting their hands to the plough. A man worn out by age and more full of virtues than of days, ought not to be treated so, that through discouragement he should swerve from his purpose to the detriment of many souls, but be rather encouraged and treated with gentleness, that he may persevere to keep alive the salvation which God has worked by him in our land. Daily does the wheat grow thin in the garner of the Lord, and the chaff is multiplied. May God preserve your holiness in safety for His church. Farewell."

Besides these bishops, Gilbert found a more extraordinary advocate, and that was Henry II. At one period of the contest with the archbishop, it was his policy to conciliate the monastic orders ; their names were useful to him in his desperate struggle.¹ Another reason why he liked the Gilbertine order was, that it was purely English. Henry, like all our kings, loved not the spiritual jurisdiction of any foreign prelate, abbot or potentate. For this reason he disliked the Cistercians ; in the latter part of this contest, it suited his purpose to cajole them, but when the archbishop was sheltered at Pontigny, he wrote to authorities abroad and threatened to turn every Cistercian out of England. The

¹ Ep. iii. 29. iv. 38.

Gilbertines, therefore, were an order that did not interfere with his purposes. Besides this, however, it appears that he had a real reverence and regard for Gilbert. Henry Plantagenet had his good moments, and under good guidance he might have been other than he was. He at one time patronized the Carthusians, and procured the appointment of St. Hugh to the diocese of Lincoln. In the same way he could not help admiring the unworldliness of Gilbert. He therefore wrote to the pope and threatened to resume whatever he himself or his nobles had given to the order, if the institute was changed by the machinations of the rustics, as he called them, who were the bondmen of the soil. Henry was imperious even when he did good ; however Alexander could not resist so many testimonies in favour of the Gilbertines, and sent a mandate to Gilbert forbidding any one to attempt to alter the institute without his consent, and empowering him and his successors, the priors of Sempringham, to correct and amend the statutes with the help of the other priors of the order. Alexander added also various privileges to the order, and confirmed all that his predecessors had granted.

CHAPTER X.

The death of Gilbert.

THE gaps left in his narrative by Gilbert's biographer, have made the various chapters of his life more like detached scenes than a continuous history ; or rather it would be more true to say, that his life was ordinarily one of peace and harmony, passed in the calmness of

the convent, so that for many years he was hidden with God, and history has nothing to do with him. Sometimes he is called forth for some special purpose and he plays his part before the world and all men gaze upon him, and then he goes back to his cloister and is no longer heard of. It is all like a sweet and low chaunt which cannot be heard outside the walls of the church, except when sometimes it swells into bolder and more majestic music. We are now however come to the last scene of all. Gilbert, as we have seen, outlived one generation of saints ; but before he died, another with whom he had been connected had now passed away. St. Thomas of Canterbury had won his crown nineteen years before Gilbert's death ; and he was at least eighty years old when the saint was martyred. After all his troubles, he spent these last days in peace ; when the ear heard him, then it blessed him, when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him. He was revered all over England ; and we have seen, says his biographer, bishops on their knees begging for his blessing, yea, and bishops from foreign lands, which the echoes of his fame had reached, coming to beg for a portion of his garments to carry back with them to their own lands as relics. But the strangest homage which he received was, when king Henry would not allow him to come to his court on the business of the order, but went himself to his lodgings with his peers, and humbly begged for his benediction. The scourge of the monks of Canterbury must have done its work when Henry bowed so low. Eleanor too, his unhappy queen, loved to bring to him her princely boys, that they might kneel down and be blessed by him. Henry seems to have had an almost superstitious reverence for him ; when his sons revolted against him, and his queen was imprisoned by

him for her crimes, when poor Henry's heart was broken and the sins of his life all came upon him, then a messenger came to tell him that Gilbert was dead. The king groaned deeply, and said, "Well do I know that he has passed away from the earth, for that is the reason that all these misfortunes have found me out." A man who had lived through the whole of the twelfth century from its very beginning, could not but be an object of reverence. It was a wonderful sight to see this old man with his body bent with age, his bones scarce cleaving to his flesh, and his whole frame pallid and wasted, yet still capable of managing the affairs of his order, and going about with his eye undimmed, and his mind as vigorous as ever. At length, however, his sight failed him and he became quite blind before he died. Then he sent for Roger, prior of Malton, and put the whole management of the order into his hands. Still, however, the spirit rose above the body ; he could not ride, but he was borne in a litter from place to place. His brethren were very anxious that he should take his meals in his bed-room, for the refectory was a long way off, and there were some steps to be mounted at the entrance. He, however, never would consent to this arrangement, and said : Gilbert will never set an example to his successors of eating good things in his room. So every day he was carried by some of the brethren into the refectory. Even in this extreme old age, when his limbs hardly held together, he kept his old practice of watching at night, and would rise when all were asleep and kneel by the side of his bed ; and when once he was discovered in this posture by his brethren, he half chid them as though they had not made his bed comfortably the evening before, to account for his being found in this strange posture. When his

external sense had failed him, the eye of his soul was the more fixed upon God, and tears often ran down his cheeks, as he thought upon his Saviour and His infinite mercies. He would often speak on spiritual things with the brethren, but his words were few and short, and he soon relapsed into silence, which was often broken by strong prayers and ejaculations which burst from him, "How long, Lord, wilt thou forget me for ever?" "Woe is me, for the time of my sojourning is prolonged!" And if he ever thought that he had spoken more than he ought, he would at once kneel down and repeat the confession of the church, humbly begging to be absolved. In this way he lived on, hardly holding to earth either by body or soul, till he was more than a hundred years old; at length, early in the year 1189, he felt his end to be approaching, and he sent letters to all his priories to beg that prayers should be offered for him, leaving his blessing behind him, and absolving all from their sins against the rule, at the same time solemnly warning all those who should quarrel with their brethren and break the peace of the order, that this absolution would profit them nothing. He was then at Cadney, one of the lonely island-monasteries of the order, and so near his end was he thought to be, that he received extreme unction, and the last rites of the church. But he rallied, and the dying saint still crossed the waters which surrounded the island, and his chaplains bore their precious burden to Sempringham, through lonely places, lest they should be forcibly detained by any one who might wish Gilbert's bones to lie in his church. All the priors of the order had time to assemble and come to him. Here he was lying as was thought in a sort of stupor on his bed, and no one was with him, but the canon who eventually suc-

ceeded him as prior. He was conscious of no one's presence, when he was heard murmuring low to himself the Antiphone in the service for a confessor, "He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor." Then, he continued in the same low tone, as though he were expounding it in the church, "Yes, he hath dispersed to many persons ; he gave, he did not sell ; it was to the poor too, not to the rich." And then he subjoined as if to the canon who was with him, "It is thy place to do so now." He continued in this half unconscious state through the night, till, as the morning dawned, and the convent was singing the lauds for Saturday, and the reader's voice repeated, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand," the eternal morning dawned on the blessed saint, and his soul passed into the hands of its Creator.

This was on Saturday, the fourth of February, 1189. Twelve years after, on the Eve of Holy Cross-day, 1202, a vast concourse assembled at Sempringham to witness the translation of his relics to a more honourable place in the church of the priory. He had wrought no miracles in his lifetime, but when he was dead God was pleased, through his intercession, to heal many who came to kneel at his tomb. In the beginning of the year, Innocent III. had canonized him, after a judicial enquiry into his merits and the miracles wrought by his body ; and now the archbishop of Canterbury, with other bishops, and many an abbot, came to translate his relics. Then the body of St. Gilbert was raised on the shoulders of England's chief nobles, and in solemn procession was borne to the place which it was to occupy. Truly, God doth bring down the mighty from their seat, and exalt the humble and meek.

Now that we have gone through St. Gilbert's life,

for so we may now call him, it seems hard to us to realize that such a person ever existed. We who live in the world, whose eye glances from one object of affection to another, and is taken by all, whose ears are tickled with praise and pained by blame, who set up for intellect and talent, if we have it, and fancy that we have it, if we have it not, whose highest austerity consists in temperance, and highest charity in good humour, we can hardly do more than gaze on a character like Gilbert's, and wonder if after all it be true. Those of us who rise above this standard, in as far as they rise above it, may enter into the notion of a saint. But to us, common-place christians, it is only a beautiful dream of something which is past long ago, and which is nothing to us. And this sort of feeling is a dangerous one and likely to increase, when lives of saints take the place of romances and fairy tales. To deny or not to realize the existence of Christian Saints, is apt to make a wide gap in christian faith. They who consider the saints in a dreamy way, will hardly be able to do more than dream that there has been upon earth one, who was and is Man-God, for the lives of saints are shadows of His, and help to interpret His actions who is incomprehensible. They who look upon the saints as mere personages in religious romance, will be apt to look on christianity as a beautiful philosophy. St. Gilbert was a real being of flesh and blood, the parish priest of Sempringham ; his institute is a fact in the history of the English church ; it was raised up by God as an opponent of the lust which was the especial wickedness of the day. It saved a great many souls which might otherwise have perished ; it raised many others to an extraordinary degree of sanctity. It is, therefore, a fact which stares us in the face and of which we must make

the best we can ; a vast number of persons, amounting to fifteen hundred, did give up all the joys of home, and refuse to give place in their hearts to the strong affections which entwine round the hearts of those who are married, in order to live in poverty a hard and austere life. In this case too all allowances are made ; the defects of the order are exposed ; the temptations peculiar to monastic life are seen clearly ; the nuns of Watton, it is true, did become savage old maids instead of virgins of Christ ; the order did not spread much after the death of the founder, and, unlike the great monastic institutions of the continent, never out of the country which gave it birth ; finally, it appears in after times to have degenerated. Yet, with all these drawbacks, it is true that St. Gilbert did a great work, and one at which kings and queens stopped to look, for it forced itself upon their notice. Even the impure Eleanor loved to think of the institute of holy virgins, and the tyrant Henry bowed before its founder. And all this was affected by a man not so unlike externally to one of ourselves. He went to Paris as we might go to Oxford or Cambridge, and he came back and took a family living and was ordained upon it. His character too, as we have said before, was not one of what is called romance. He was distinguished by a quiet waiting upon the will of God, and a most energetic and unbending execution of it, when he had once ascertained it. He remained in the Bishop of Lincoln's palace much longer than he wished, because though utterly uncongenial to his tastes and habits, he would not break away from where God had placed him. At length the archdeaconry was offered him ; this was too much and he went away. All the vast good which he effected, was the result of natural circumstances. The institution of his order was for

the sake of seven maidens, whom Providence put into his way, and to whom God gave grace to desire perfection under his guidance, in his parish. His application to St. Bernard, and the appointment of canons, arose naturally out of the increase of the monasteries. Enthusiasm such as his, is seldom found connected with such quiet waiting upon God. And this part of his character all may imitate. Not every man is called upon to found a monastic order and govern it ; nor to take the part of a holy archbishop like St. Thomas, under peril of a king's anger ; but all must quietly wait upon God in times of darkness, and keep their souls free from inordinate affection, and be ready to follow the gentle leading of God's will wherever it may lead them, even to the most painful sacrifice. Very few of us can be monks and nuns ; but all are called upon to live above the world, and by daily self-sacrifice to train themselves to give up at a moment's notice whatever is most dear. And they especially who have apparently least duties, unmarried persons, should wait calmly on the Providence of God, ready to accept whatever lot in life He may prepare for them, wishing for nothing, and hoping for nothing but what He wills. Meanwhile, they have more time than others for frequent prayer and for long and steady contemplation of our blessed Lord, in the great mysteries of the faith. Then, as the wonders of heaven, by God's grace, grow upon them, they will see the excellence of the good part of Mary, to sit at the Lord's feet and to hear the words which He speaks to the soul. And in proportion as they realize the Incarnation of the Lord, they will love more and more to contemplate the saints, and especially St. Mary, for a reverence for her is inseparable from that right faith in the Humanity of the Son of God, which

we must all believe and confess. They will learn that the high honour in which the church has ever held holy virginity, is a necessary portion of christian doctrine, and not a rhapsody peculiar to any age. It is a feeling which has seized on minds of every stamp from the most matter-of-fact to the most imaginative, if only illuminated by God's grace. St. Gilbert's character could not come under either of these classes ; besides the all-enduring energy of the homely Saxon, he had a dash of the adventurous Norman ; and the Holy Spirit had blended both these discordant elements into one, as he would in his mercy again blend the spiritual character of the English nation, if it were not a stiff-necked people.

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